Out of the Jaws of Death

Frank Barrett

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BY

FRANK BARRETT

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SAUVAGE

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Out of the Jaws of Death.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WE MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Darkness compelled us to keep on the outskirts of the forest, for within the obscurity was so impenetrable that we should have had to grope our way from tree to tree, only, may be, to find when light came that we had been travelling in a circle. The glow of the smouldering kameras at least indicated the direction we were not to take, and the light of the stars was sufficient to enable us to keep a tolerably straight course. For the rest we trusted to luck, being entirely ignorant of the surrounding country, even to the name of the province in which we were. Only this we knew—the forest was of vast extent. For three

days past we had travelled in sight of an unbroken stretch of firs.

We were cheerful enough as we plodded on. The sense of freedom, the hope of escape from that terrible Arctic settlement, buoyed us up and gave us strength and courage to go on. Only as it began to grow light we cast apprehensive glances behind us for pursuing Cossacks; but not a speck rose out of the great white plain. The remains of the étape were lost to sight. There was no sign of habitation or living creature between us and the dark line of far distant forest that bounded the horizon.

"It's odd," said Gordon in a tone of perplexity, after looking about on the snow around us—"it's odd that there are no marks of feet. I saw by the ticket on the wall last night that there were six hundred and odd in the kameras, and one would think that some of that number surely would take the path we have chosen. There were but two ways to go."

It was a mystery to me also; but I thought it

an advantage, for the majority of the convicts we had passed on the road were horrible-looking villains, the number of unshackled prisoners—men exiled for political offences—being very small indeed. Besides this, it seemed to me that the fewer footprints there were in the snow the less likelihood there was of pursuit being made in our direction, as there would certainly be a better chance of making captives in the other.

Gordon agreed that this conclusion was a plausible one, but with rather less hopefulness than usual, I thought. Possibly it had occurred to him, as it occurred to me later, that the convicts led by old hands—"brodyags," who had made their escape into the forest over and over again—had taken the other direction, because it was the only one by which it was possible to save themselves. As a matter of fact, the convicts, with some few exceptions, had gone no farther than the verge of the forest, and finding shelter beyond the outlying brushwood and snowdrift, had thrown themselves down on the

carpet of pine needles to pass the rest of the night as comfortably as they could, knowing that the police would not make the slightest effort to retake them. Escape was impossible. Sooner or later starvation would oblige them to give themselves up. They would "hear the robin sing," as they pathetically phrased it, only so long as they could resist the torture of hunger.

When it grew lighter we also struck into the forest, and sat down under a canopy of frozen snow spread over the meeting boughs of the great pines.

We were not cold, for there was no wind, and exercise had thoroughly warmed our blood; but we were tired, and already hunger was suggesting the question, "What are we to eat?"

But we said nothing on that subject for some time, fearing to betray our own misgivings. At length Gordon, after looking round him in silence, said—

"Awfully quiet in here, isn't it?"

I nodded, looking round me also. Indeed,

the stillness was in the true sense of the word awful.

"I can't see a living thing anywhere," he continued; "and yet there must be, you know."

"Taras told me there were wolves in the forests. Are they good to eat?"

"Well, I've never tried 'em," he answered evasively, concealing whatever disagreeable reflections this question may have suggested; "but one thing is certain, they wouldn't exist if there were nothing for them to eat. If we could knock over a rabbit now, or even an old crow, we could soon make a fire to cook him, and then we should be as right as rain."

He had mechanically filled his pipe, and was now about to light it. He stopped, and I saw him ruefully counting the small number of vestas that remained in his box. When they were gone there would be no more smoking.

"I say, do you think you could smoke a cigarette?" he asked hopefully. "'Baccy's a

wonderful comfort at all times; but when you're a bit pinched, you know—"

He pulled out his tobacco pouch temptingly. I told him I would rather not try it yet awhile.

"I think I shall enjoy it more presently," said he, putting his pipe in his pocket.

Then I noticed by the limpness of his pouch as he put that away that his tobacco was nearly all gone.

When we began to feel chilly we walked on again—keeping under the trees with the hope of finding some animal that might serve us for food—the snowdrift that edged the wood being our guide.

Gordon had provided himself with a stout stick; but we saw no sign of living creature the whole day, and the only thing we found to eat was some frozen moss and a leathery kind of lichen. On and on we went, skirting the edge of the plain, through the interminable forest until the light began to fade; then we went out and looked beyond the drift. The boundless

plain, with the edging of black pines, was all we saw—nothing else.

"We must think now of making ourselves comfortable for the night," said Gordon as we re-entered the forest. "We will have a good fire, at any rate."

Fuel was not wanting. The edge of the wood was strewn with broken wood—limbs torn from the trees by the gales that swept across the plain, or broken down in former winters by the weight of ice and snow. We collected a great heap, and having built the foundation of our fire, Gordon, with infinite care, struck one of his precious matches and lit the pile of dry leaves and fir cones. I knew then why he had refrained from smoking all day. Our lives depended on those vestas; for if they gave out before we could get a fresh supply we must freeze to death.

As soon as the fire was well alight we scraped a narrow trench, about six feet long, in the thick bed of fir needles facing the fire, and, framing a

kind of roof over it with pine branches, piled a mass of twigs and rubbish of all kinds on top so as to exclude the cold air. We both worked with a will, leaving off now and then to put fresh fuel on the fire, and, when it was finished, felt very well satisfied with our performance.

"Now," said Gordon when we had put the finishing touch to the roof, "creep inside, mademoiselle, and see if you can get a few hours' sleep."

"But we have got to make another shelter for you," said I.

"No; one will serve us both—turn and turn about. It won't do to let the fire go down, you know"—it was in this way he disguised his fear of an attack by wolves—"and I promise you to take my full share of rest as soon as you have had yours."

I crept into the trench, and, stretching myself out at full length, found that the springy fir needles made a better bed than the hard

planks of the kameras. It was pleasantly warm, too, with the heat thrown out by the fire.

Gordon seated himself at the opening with his heavy stick beside him, and, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, lit the first pipe of the day. It was good to see the happy content in his face as he slowly smoked, letting the clouds issue slowly from his lips, and the leaping flames of the fire beyond him. Indeed, but for the craving of hunger I had no reason to complain, but a good deal to be thankful for.

It was not long before I dropped off, and I slept soundly, as it seemed to me, for a good long while. But when I awoke Gordon declared that it was not yet time to think about changing the watch; so, not unwillingly, but perhaps selfishly, I dropped off again.

I awoke a second time to find him still patiently sitting on guard at my feet; but he gave me the same answer, and would not permit me to take his place. And when, after a third space of sleep, he allowed me to come out, I saw

by the grey light between the trees that the night was past. Then, having piled more wood on the fire, and handed his stick over to me with instructions to give him "a crack over the toes" with it if I heard the slightest sounds or detected any movement in the surrounding trees, he crawled into the trench, and in a few minutes was snoring sonorously.

In a couple of hours he came out, protesting that he could sleep no longer; and having nothing to detain us we recommenced our onward march.

I have no need to dwell on this part of my history, for further testimony to the patient courage, generosity, and unceasing kindness of George Gordon is unnecessary, and nothing occurred to break the terrible monotony of our journey through the dreary forest until the fourth day of our escape. In the afternoon of that day we came upon a road cut through the forest and debouching upon the plain. This discovery threw us into a state of intense excite-

ment. It was like a vision of water in the desert.

Not a soul was in sight, but there were marks of sledge runners in the snow that had fallen the day before.

"It's not a main road—that is evident by its narrowness," said Gordon, grasping my hand.

"What shall we do?" I asked, trembling violently.

"If it only leads to a farm, we're all right. No one would be so inhuman as to refuse us food, seeing how pinched and done up we are. If, on the other hand, it leads to a town, why then we stand a good chance of being made prisoners again. What do you say to stopping here while I go on and reconnoitre?"

"No, no. If you go on, I will go with you; and if they take you they shall take me."

"Why, to be sure, that wouldn't be worse than being left alone in this beastly forest. We run a risk whichever course we take; but the

chance of being taken is preferable to the risk of starving to death; and I fear we couldn't go much farther, my poor girl, before we had to lie down like the babes in the wood, and leave the rest to the cock robins. Come—what do you say?"

"Let us go on along this road."

"And hope for the best," he added sturdily, pressing my arm to his side and stepping out.

Hope helped us to get over the ground at a good pace for some distance; but as the light began to fade, my spirits fell also, and I grew sick and feeble from exhaustion and want of food. The road seemed as endless and deserted as the forest itself. Then, leaning more and more heavily on Gordon's arm, I plodded wearily on, with feet that seemed to cling to the ground, until my companion, seeing that my strength was wellnigh spent, said—

"I'm done up, my dear girl. Let us stop for the night. We can dream of having a

good supper—that will be some satisfaction — and then to-morrow we will realise our dream."

"If we could only go to sleep and never wake again!" I murmured faintly.

"Ah, you'll not say that when we get a loaf of black bread and some salt before us," he replied, smacking his lips. We craved for nothing beyond that simple fare.

We made our usual preparations for the night.

"One more," said Gordon, closing his box after taking out a match to light the fire.

We sat down on the windward side of the blazing sticks, and began to pick fir cones to pieces, having discovered by accident that some of them contained seed that was eatable. From this engrossing occupation we were suddenly startled by hearing a low laugh, and, looking up, we saw a man standing near us, with a sack slung over one shoulder and a heavy stick in his right hand.

"Who are you?" cried Gordon, springing to his feet.

"Ivan Dontremember," the man replied in tolerable English. "You've seen me before—by a better fire than this."

As he spoke he pushed back his hood and thrust out his chin, showing a red beard, an impish face, and a massive cranium, disproportionately large for the size of his face and perfectly bald. I recognised him at once as the man who had stood beside us by the burning kameras.

"You've chosen an odd place for your fire," he said with another chuckle as he threw down his sack carelessly and rested himself on it. "One can see you are novices. An old hand at this sort of thing—one of the large family of Dontremembers, for instance—would have taken the precaution to see whether the smoke would blow into the road or not before lighting up. But perhaps you are tired of liberty and swine food. Are you?"

"Why do you ask?" Gordon demanded.

"Because your smoke is blowing straight down the road, and the post-house is not five hundred yards distant. The man there has orders to take prisoner or shoot any refugee that comes within his reach."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FREEDOM AT A ROUBLE A DAY.

"You seem to treat the danger pretty lightly," said Gordon. "Perhaps *you* are tired of liberty?"

"Not a bit of it. I have just bought freedom for three days, at the rate of a rouble a day, and here it is," said Ivan Dontremember, striking the sack on which he sat.

"What have you got there?" Gordon asked eagerly.

"Freedom, I tell you, for three days. It's indispensable. How much longer do you think you are going to keep up on fir cones? Twelve hours at the outside, I should say, by the look of madam."

"What have you got in the sack, I ask?" Gordon repeated savagely.

"Bread, and I'll guard it as I would my life," Ivan Dontremember answered, catching the gleam of desperation which lit my eyes as well as Gordon's.

"We are starving; we have eaten nothing for four days. You must give us some."

"You can get as much as you want at the post. Schemyl must keep his prisoners alive till the patrol comes round to collect them. Why should I shorten my term of freedom to prolong yours?"

Gordon looked at me. "Shall we give ourselves up?" his eyes asked; and mine answering "Yes," he held out his hand to me and said—

"Come."

"I'm afraid you are leaving with a bad opinion of me," said Ivan Dontremember as I rose. "That's the worst of being perfectly reasonable—one's sure to offend some amiable fool. Now, if you only had a rouble or two—"

"What!" cried Gordon, tearing open his coat to get at his note-case; "you will sell your liberty?"

"Of course I will. Schemyl always keeps a good stock on hand on the chance of a moneyed customer dropping in. Plenty more where this came from," he continued, untying his sack and producing a loaf. "It's rather a high price—a rouble a loaf, pretty nearly half a crown of your money—but these poor Government officials must live."

Without a word Gordon snatched a note from his case, thrust it into Ivan's hand, and took possession of the loaf. Then, with horrible laughter, we tore the loaf in two, and ate with the ravenous fury of starved beasts. For a time we forgot everything but the animal joy of satisfying our craving appetite. Whether Ivan spoke to us or not I do not know. It was not until our hunger had been appeased that we could think of him.

"What right have you to put temptation in

a poor devil's way?" he growled. "Do you know the value of the note you gave me?"

Gordon shook his head, still eating.

"A thousand roubles—three years' freedom! Life-long freedom, who knows? Take it back, or I may be tempted yet to knock you on the head."

He pushed the note into Gordon's hand, and turning away set his elbows on his knees, dropped his bristly red beard in his palms, and rocked himself slowly backward and forward, scowling into the fire.

Gordon looked at him and then at me in silent perplexity; we both doubted whether the little man was in his right mind. Presently glancing round and perceiving that Gordon still held the note in his hand, Ivan Dontremember said angrily—

"Put it away, I tell you—hide it up. Don't you know that the forest is alive with desperate men? Any one of them would murder the pair of you to get that. Why shouldn't they? Necessity

knows no law but self-preservation. Do you know it was in my mind to brain you as you sat there in an ecstasy of animal pleasure? At least you would have gone out of the world happy; it would have saved you—and the Government—years of trouble, and me, too. Oh, there was enough justification. Reason was on my side and opportunity as well. You would have done it in my place. There was murder in your eye when you asked for bread. Bread is only a means to living; the end of living is freedom. A man will fight for life while there's a hope of freedom; when that hope is gone he will blow his brains out."

"With your views," said Gordon, "I am surprised that you did not, at least, make off with the note."

"Perhaps I overlooked that alternative in the greater temptation to kill you. The probability was that you had other notes in your case —money enough to make escape certain."

"If you felt yourself justified, why didn't you kill me?"

"For a fool of a reason—a sentimental one. Something in your build, your face—not the murderous expression in it, you may be sure—deterred me. I felt, just at the critical moment, as if I were about to kill my dearest friend. And I can't shake off this womanly feeling while I look at you—that's the queer thing."

"Some personal resemblance?" Gordon suggested.

Ivan Dontremember nodded gloomily and turned his eyes again on the fire.

"It's an odd coincidence that my resemblance to a Russian has not only saved his life, but was the cause of my life being in jeopardy."

"What Russian?" asked Ivan, turning quickly.

"Taras—Prince Borgensky."

"Taras!" cried Ivan, starting to his feet. "Is he alive?"

"He was when we left him, not two months ago."

"Where was he then?"

"In London."

"Thank the Fates!"

"You know him?"

"What honest Russian who lived five years ago does not know Taras?"

Then he broke into Russian, apostrophising Taras with poetical fervour in words that I failed to follow. Suddenly he checked himself, and turning to us he said, as if to excuse himself—

"I have been dead five years, and buried in the fortress of Petropaulovsk. One hears nothing there. There was no political prisoner in our gang—all cut-throats and scoundrels—they could tell me nothing. What should they know of Taras?"

And after a pause he added, with a pathetic tremor in his voice—

"I thought he must be dead, too—my friend."

He walked slowly round the fire to indulge his reflections, touching an ember here and there absently with his stick. Coming close to where we sat, silent in sympathy, he said—

"Did you know him—Taras?"

"Intimately."

"Is he well? What is he doing? How does he pass his days? Tell me all about him."

"You can answer these questions better than I," said Gordon, nodding to me.

I spoke, telling of our everyday life and of the work Taras was doing.

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Ivan gleefully when I had described the groups of statuary. "He still sticks to his guns, that good fighter Taras. But do they leave him alone—the police?"

"No, worse luck!" Gordon replied, and then he told of the attempts made to kidnap Taras and of the happy chance by which I had saved him, though he attributed my success, not to chance, but to courage and devotion.

"I beg your pardon," said Ivan, bowing to

me. "I did you an injustice, thinking that you English women could do nothing except talk. But who is at the bottom of this conspiracy, do you know that?"

"I am ashamed to say he's a countryman of mine; at least, he speaks the same language," said Gordon.

"An Irishman?" asked Ivan sharply.

"Yes."

"His name?—quick!"

"Barry Kavanagh."

"Infernal villain!" muttered Ivan through his clenched teeth.

"Do you know him?"

"Ay, and with good reason. Is he married? Do you know any woman who calls herself his wife? A woman—she should be thirty now—with blue eyes and a timid, pretty face? Do you know her?" he asked eagerly. "Don't be afraid to speak if you know more than that."

We assured him that we had never heard of his having a wife.

"I pray to God she is dead!" he said fervently. "Better that she should be murdered by him than live to share his treachery. She was my sister," he added after a pause. "That is why I trusted him. And when he knew all that I could tell him he sold me to the police. To conceal that fact, I have been kept all these years in prison. Never mind that. Tell me all you know about him—every detail that comes into your mind. Who knows what this may lead to?"

We told him all that we knew, all that we thought about Kavanagh. His emotion had subsided, and he listened with intense fixity of purpose in his set features, not uttering a sound until the last word we had to say on the subject was spoken. Then, without debating any point in our statement, he said at once—

"There is more villainy underlying this than you dream of. Does he owe you money?"

"A trifle—a few pounds upon our last game of cards, that's all."

Ivan dropped his voice, and asked a question which was not intended for my ears. Gordon shook his head in the negative, and then asked—

"Wasn't there sufficient reason for his sending us out of England?"

"For getting rid of mademoiselle, certainly, but for sending you here—well, there was motive enough for an ordinary villain, but not enough for such a villain as Kavanagh."

"At any rate, now we are here, we may console ourselves with the belief that poor old Taras will be left alone, unless the Minister of Police, who must know that I am not Taras——"

"Oh, he knows that well enough!" said Ivan Dontremember with a toss of his head. "Kavanagh wouldn't attempt to deceive him. The whole plot has been carried out with his consent. The Minister's main object was to satisfy his master, the Czar: that is done, and Kavanagh has given a sufficient guarantee that Taras shall be heard of no more. He will be silenced before that terra-cotta is burnt, un-

less——" he added reflectively. Then, after a moment's pause, he asked abruptly, "You have money?"

"Plenty—in London."

"But here?"

Gordon did not know how much he had. Just before starting he put a notebook containing all his ready money in his pocket, on the chance of money being needed for the rescue of Taras, and some of these notes he had changed into Russian money at Moscow. He pulled out his case again, and opening it found that besides the note for a thousand roubles he had two of a hundred, and five English notes of £5 each.

"Not enough," said Ivan in a tone of disappointment. "But put them up. Guard them as you would your life. They may be worth more than that even."

With the fear that some of the escaped convicts might even now be watching us, I turned my head, and glancing amongst the

scattered trees behind us I distinctly saw a white face standing out of the darkness.

I sprang up with a cry of alarm. Gordon was by my side in a moment.

"There's no danger," said Ivan, who had stepped forward a couple of paces with his stick tightly grasped. "It's only my friend, honest Schemyl.

Schemyl stalked across the opening, a rifle resting in the hollow of his arm. He wore a conical fur cap pulled down to his brows, and a long frieze coat that came up to his ears. A bristly moustache, a red snub nose, and a pair of ferrety eyes were all one could see of his face. He looked fiercely at us as he stopped in the full light of the fire.

"I have stopped to have a chat with two acquaintances, Peter Schemyl," said Ivan, in almost a bantering tone. "They are English, travelling in Russia for pleasure, as you know English will at this season of the year. But unfortunately they have lost their way——"

"And their papers, perhaps?" said Peter Schemyl grimly.

"You have divined the truth, Peter Schemyl, with your usual astuteness. My friends have bought a loaf of me for a rouble, and I was just telling them where they might buy more when that is gone."

"Hum! Bread is very scarce in the country, and the price goes up daily. I may oblige an old friend now and then with a loaf at cost price, but a stranger must expect to pay a few kopecks over and above."

"I will tell them. The gentleman does not speak Russian; the lady only understands it a little."

"Tell them, likewise, that it's against the regulations to make fires in the forest; and, though I may allow it now and then, they must be particularly careful that the smoke doesn't blow down the road. If a posse of Cossacks happened to come along, there would be such hacking and coughing that I should never hear the last of it."

"I will warn them."

"Very good. At the same time let them know that the governor of this province strongly objects to anyone camping within half a verst of the road, and that I have excellent dried fish and tea of the first quality. Peace be with you!"

And with this parting salutation Peter Schemyl turned on his heel, like a guard on parade, and marched off.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TIDE BEGINS TO TURN.

"Is that fellow a type of his class?" asked Gordon when Peter Schemyl was gone.

"Yes; and the class is typical of the whole genus of Government officials. Every one of them is to be bought. With men of his rank the process is, as you see, simple enough; with men of higher grade the bribe must be higher, and one has to employ a little tact—that is the only difference. You might have bought yourself off at St. Petersburg had you known how to handle the Minister."

"In that case, why should we not get back to England?"

"I have thought of that. But you haven't

enough. Every official on the road to the frontier would have to be bribed."

"But I have enough money in England."

"How are you to get it?"

"Write for it. The letter could be addressed to Schemyl."

Ivan Dontremember laughed.

"Not a letter comes into Schemyl's hands that has not passed through a dozen on the road. Every official is on the look-out for a means to bleed another. Your letter would be opened to a certainty, and Peter Schemyl would be forced to hand you over to someone else. You would never get your remittance, though by letting yourself be plundered judiciously you might at last get away; but it would take years, and we haven't a day to lose. Twelve hundred roubles and twenty-five pounds English——"

He made a mental calculation, then, shaking his head, said—

"I'm afraid there's no chance for you, but I can ask Peter Schemyl. Yes, I will go back and

have a dram with him on the strength of having sold a loaf to advantage. Give me a few kopecks. I have spent my last."

Gordon took the loose silver from his pocket, and, putting it in Ivan Dontremember's hand, said—

"Whatever arrangement you make with the fellow, you will bear one thing in mind: we take you with us, or we stay with you and share what we have in equal parts till all is gone."

Ivan Dontremember looked gravely in Gordon's face for a minute, then with a smile turned and left us in silence.

A long time elapsed—more than two hours, I think—before we saw him again. When at length he returned, we saw by his quick, firm step and the animation in his deep-sunk eyes as he drew near the fire that our case was not hopeless.

"I had to make the rascal drunk on his own liquor," he said, in explanation of his long absence, as he threw himself down on the ground

beside us. "That's a long job with a Russian peasant, even when he helps himself at your expense. There was no getting a word of truth out of him while he was sober: would not on any consideration—no, not for all the gold in the world—betray the trust placed in him by the Government; preferred death to dishonour, and all the rest of it. However, little by little, as he grew more and more drunk, he confessed to having at different times got five exiles out of Siberia, and two of them across the frontier. Finally he let me know exactly what it cost him to get these two to Berlin; that is what I wanted to find out. As I expected, the cost is greater than your means will allow you to pay."

"How much?" Gordon asked in a tone of anxiety still tinged with hope.

"The cost of getting one from here to Berlin is, roughly, five hundred roubles."

"That means fifteen hundred for the three, and we have but twelve! But there are the English notes; won't that make enough?"

"Not enough for two. I did not overlook the English notes."

"But, my dear fellow, you said——"

"That it cost Peter Schemyl five hundred. I believe it. He spoke in the honesty of drink. You cannot expect him to do an act of charity for nothing?"

"I suppose not."

"He runs a certain amount of risk, and must be paid for it, like any other honest man of enterprise. If the cost is five hundred, he would require at the least five hundred for his benevolence. Virtue must be rewarded, and the virtuous always look for a hundred per cent. on their investments."

"An infernal set of thieves!" growled Gordon, thinking of Government officials rather than the representatives of virtue. "There's no screwing him down any way?"

"None. What pressure can we bring to bear? You are at his mercy, and he will make the most of it, naturally. He knows

that he will get every penny you have for food, and two-thirds of it will be clear profit. He takes the minimum amount of risk, and it costs him nothing except an occasional bottle of villainous spirits to blind those who might find that he is taking in more bread than his family has been in the habit of consuming."

There was an interval of silence, and then Gordon, turning to me with a sigh, said—

"Well, my dear girl, I'm afraid you will have to go alone."

I looked at him and then at Ivan Dontremember in mute astonishment. Ivan was regarding Gordon with a curious look in his face, but showed no surprise.

"I go alone!" said I at length, with bated breath.

"I don't see any help for it; for it's clear neither of us can go with you."

"It isn't going alone I'm thinking about; it's leaving you behind," said I.

"Oh, don't you bother about us. If this old rascal will take you to Berlin for a thousand roubles, we shall still have two hundred left. And that will carry us on capitally, eh, old chappie?" he asked, turning to Ivan Dont-remember, and clapping him familiarly on the shoulder, as though he had made up his mind to break down all barriers and begin, as they were going on, in perfect brotherhood and good-fellowship.

"There's one alternative," said Ivan gravely, when he had overcome the shock of this accolade. "We may find out where we are, get some sort of a map, make our way to the frontier on foot, and so escape."

"Why, certainly, it sounds as if there were something in that," said Gordon.

"Not much, I am afraid. The difficulties are enormous, especially with the winter upon us. The chance of running the blockade is very small indeed."

"Any chance is better than none at all.

Come, my dear girl, this will reconcile you to leaving us."

"Not at all. Why shouldn't I go with you? Do you think I'm selfish, after all we've gone through together?" I asked, my eyes filling with tears.

"Heaven forbid I should do you that injustice But these difficulties you hear our friend speaking of—remember you are only a girl, though quite as brave as the best of us."

"I won't hinder you. You shall never hear me complain," I urged.

"I have not the slightest doubt that mademoiselle could face all that we may encounter, and be a help, as she certainly would be a comfort to us," said Ivan, with more courtesy and kindness than he had yet shown me. "But there is one serious objection. This journey must occupy months, and during that time we are doing nothing to save Taras."

My heart sank within me in shame. I had

forgotten Taras—Heaven forgive me!—for the moment.

"At any moment Kavanagh may receive orders to silence Taras; the production of that statue would inevitably lead to the order being given. When it is given Kavanagh will obey it ruthlessly."

"I will go to him," said I, as eagerly as I had prayed to stay with Gordon the minute before.

"It is advisable to look well at that before you decide," said Ivan. "It is by no means certain that you will reach London. Schemyl, with the greatest incentive to get you through, may fail. Some trusted confidant may think it advisable to betray him; some jealous official may be dissatisfied with his bribe. In that case you lose all hope of seeing Taras again. If you are arrested on the road you will never see this friend again. You will be banished or kept in prison where no tidings of you will ever reach us, or word from us reach you."

"No matter," said I. "I will venture anything, everything, to save Taras."

"It is advisable that you should go—if we can arrange the affair with Schemyl—for the sake of Taras, and for yours as well," he added, turning to Gordon. "You have money?"

"At my bankers' in London."

"They would pay a certain sum to your order?"

"I haven't a cheque book; but I suppose that is not necessary. An order with my signature would be met all right."

"Schemyl deals in furs. He has an agent in London—Houndsditch, I think he called the part. Your order could be made payable to him. On receipt of the money he could telegraph a word or two—such as 'Send sables' or any other phrase agreed upon—to Schemyl, who would then find means to get us across the frontier."

"By Jupiter, that's it! Why on earth didn't you suggest this at first, old fellow,

instead of proposing a scheme that would take years to work out?"

"We are venturing upon treacherous ground, and every step must be sounded. It's a waste of time to be in a hurry."

"You have wasted no time, at any rate. You seem to have thought of everything and got your plan all cut and dried."

"Schemyl gave me plenty of time to think," observed Ivan drily.

"You see how it is to be done?" said Gordon, addressing me in great excitement.

"Yes. When shall I go?"

"Nothing is certain," observed Ivan. "It may take several days to bring Schemyl to terms; but I think the prospect of gain will tempt him."

"He shall have as much as he asks to take us to Berlin, and twice as much the day we reach London," said Gordon.

"I hope you will not let him know that. If we excite his cupidity he may keep us dawdling

here for an age, in the hope of getting a ransom that you—even you—cannot pay. He is subtle, and must be dealt with subtly. That is why I did not take you with me to sound him upon the business."

"Oh, I shall be cooler to-morrow. This awful good luck has turned my head."

"There is one thing, mademoiselle," said Ivan with grave composure, undisturbed by any emotion imparted by the prospect of escape, "one thing which you should bear in mind from the very first—the necessity of extreme caution and self-control. Your escape depends greatly upon that, but the life of Taras depends still more upon it. Kavanagh must not know that you are in London. That would at once precipitate a catastrophe. You must not let even your fears for Taras lead you to take any decided action against Kavanagh, no matter how confident you may feel in your power to outwit him. If he finds that you are in London he will know that his game is up. He will *silence* Taras to

earn his wages from the police, and fly to save himself from the pursuing vengeance of our Society."

"I understand you," said I. "He shall not know that I am in London."

"He must not even suspect it; and for that reason you must avoid seeing Taras. Can you promise that you will not make yourself known, or communicate in any way with him until we join you?"

"Yes," I said after a struggle, "I will promise that."

"I have a friend in Berlin—an artist—whose skill in disguising the face and figure has saved more than one of us from the police. You shall have a letter to him, and he will help you to conceal your identity. We shall have time to go into that to-morrow."

He was silent for a moment; then, drawing a deep breath and smiling for the first time, he added—

"I think we may hope now."

"Hope!" exclaimed Gordon, "why, I have been choking with it this last quarter of an hour. If I only had a pipe of tobacco now——"

"I thought you were a smoker," said Ivan Dontremember, drawing a bag of tobacco from his pocket and putting it in Gordon's hand.

"God bless you, old fellow! You forget nothing."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

I RETURN TO LONDON.

After raising innumerable objections and creating delays with a view to exacting higher terms, Schemyl at length accepted Ivan Dontremember's offer; but the agreement being made he lost no time in preparing for my flight.

He had a daughter who had been for some time ill with a skin complaint common to the Russian peasantry, and it was arranged that he should take me to St. Petersburg under the pretence that I was this daughter going there for medical treatment; and so early one morning, in a peasant's dress, the lower part of my face caked with paste, stained in part with saffron and cochineal, I took my place in Schemyl's

sledge and bade "Good-bye" to Gordon and Ivan Dontremember.

Gordon made light of the situation by joking me on my appearance, but I could better have borne a sorrowful parting than mirth at that moment, because it would have reminded me less of our past companionship and of his untiring endeavour to lighten my misfortunes by cheerful encouragement, good temper, and fun. And when I thought that we were now parting for ever, perhaps, and that I might see him no more, that his ringing laughter might be hushed in the eternal snows of the north, my resolutions all broke down, and I burst into incontrollable tears.

"This is a bad beginning," said Ivan Dontremember gloomily; "all depends, remember, on your self-control."

Schemyl also was greatly alarmed by these tears for the preservation of the paste on my face.

Ashamed of my weakness, I dried my eyes

quickly, and having pressed Gordon's hand for the last time, lay back on the mattress arranged for me on the sledge. Schemyl tucked me in the wraps suitable to an invalid, and having given another touch to the paste on my face, declared gleefully that I could not look better if I were dying of the pest.

"If that don't satisfy the police I don't know what will," said he, looking back at me as he took his seat with great satisfaction. "One glance at that face will be enough for them. They won't dare to open her papers for fear of infection."

"You have your daughter's papers, of course?" said Ivan.

Schemyl winked, nodded, and patted his breast.

"And you yours?" Ivan added, addressing me. These papers were Gordon's order for three hundred pounds, a letter from Schemyl to his correspondent in London, and a note from Ivan to his friend in Berlin, all carefully embedded in

a box of ointment which I carried in my hand. I nodded assent.

"Then God speed you!" he exclaimed.

"Farewell, dear little woman," cried Gordon.

"Farewell," I answered as stoutly as I could, and the next minute I lost sight of them.

I pass over the vicissitudes of the long journey to St. Petersburg, and of the shorter but not less perilous journey thence across the frontier. It is sufficient to say that Schemyl successfully overcame all the difficulties that beset us, and left me at the first station in Germany, whence I proceeded to Berlin without further question. At Berlin I found Ivan Dont-remember's friend, Carl Hoffman, and delivered the letter addressed to him. He introduced me to his wife, a bright, intelligent woman, and they held a long consultation on the subject.

"The great thing," said he, going to the window, "is to choose a disguise that is the least likely to attract notice. Come here, mademoiselle, and tell me what people passing

along over the way seem to you most remarkable—most un-English."

I pointed out six or eight of the persons. Presently he said—

"You have not noticed the thin, tall old lady waiting at the corner for the tram; she is walking this way now. Do you see people like that in a London street?"

"Yes, many," I replied.

"Now see if you can walk across the room with her gait."

I imitated the walk and posture of a woman bent with age as well as I could.

"Famous!" exclaimed Mrs. Hoffman.

"Yes, I think that will do," said her husband.

They hunted up a dress of dingy black, an old bonnet and mantle trimmed with dull jet, and a pair of shabby gloves. Mr. Hoffman would have cut my hair and given me a wig, but his wife would not suffer this; so they gathered it up close on the top of my head, and

concealed it with a false front and a knot of grey hair behind. My face was carefully painted and my teeth were stained. My new friends laughed heartily as they made these alterations in my appearance, and still more heartily when, a spotted veil completing the make-up, I walked across the room, my hands folded, and carrying a rusty leather reticule, with the step of an elderly person, to look at myself in the glass. For a moment or two I stood gaping before the mirror in amazement, for it is no exaggeration to say that I did not know myself. I looked like a woman of advanced age who "has seen trouble," and this general effect was heightened by the appearance of faded gentility in my dress.

Thus disguised, I arrived in London on the morning of February 6th—three months, within a few days, from the date of my capture. With what emotions I looked up the river towards Lambeth as the train crossed at Blackfriars I cannot attempt to describe. The experiences of

the past months seemed to me like a dream from which I was now to awake. I fancied that I must see the beloved face of Taras amongst the crowd on the platform waiting my return. It was difficult to realise, being so near him, that I must still be separated from him for weeks and weeks to come. Mechanically I repeated Ivan Dontremember's last words—"all depends upon your self-control"—that I might not forget the tremendous importance of subduing my passionate impulse to find Taras and reveal myself to him.

"Keb, mum?" asked a porter, touching his cap, as I stepped out of the train. I nodded assent.

"Four-wheeler!" he called without hesitation. No better compliment than that could have been paid to the friends who had disguised me.

"Where to, lady?" asked the cabman when I was seated.

"Carter Street, Houndsditch," said I in the falsetto of old age.

At the corner of Carter Street I discharged the cab. A few doors down I saw on a shop facia the name I sought—"M. Lazarus, furrier." I entered and told the shopman I wished to see Mr. Lazarus himself.

"What name?" he asked.

"Tell him I have come from Peter Schemyl," I replied.

I was shown into a private office, where a stout dark-eyed man with a black beard received me. He eyed me curiously as I took out from the inside of my dress the purse which now contained my precious papers. I was not the first mysterious visitor, perhaps, who had brought him a message from the heart of Russia.

He took the minute sheet of closely folded thin paper, carefully opened it, and, having read the few lines it contained, said—

"You are to give me an order for three hundred pounds, madam."

"Here it is," I replied, giving up the last of the papers with a feeling of relief.

"There may be some difficulty in cashing this," he observed, raising his eyebrows as he looked at the grease-stained order. "Have you any objection to going with me to the bank?"

I agreed to this proposal, and he sent for a cab, in which we went together to Lombard Street.

"You had better come in with me," said Mr. Lazarus; "an explanation is sure to be wanted."

We entered the bank, and he presented the strange order. The clerk examined it, and then took it into the manager's office. After an interval of five or ten minutes he returned, and, handing the paper back to Mr. Lazarus, said—

"I am sorry to tell you that we cannot cash this order, sir."

"Can I see the manager? The irregularity can be explained."

"It is not a question of irregularity. We have examined Mr. Gordon's account, and find that there are no assets. Mr. Gordon drew the

whole of his deposit the day he left—that is," the clerk said, correcting himself, as if he had said more than he should have said—"on the 12th of November last year."

Mr. Lazarus turned to me and raised his eyebrows in silent interrogation.

"He drew all his money out the day he went away!" I gasped.

"The 12th of November," the clerk replied.

Mr. Lazarus handed me the order with a bow of mock civility, shrugged his shoulders as he nodded to the clerk, and turned on his heel, evidently wishing it to be understood that he washed his hands of the affair and had nothing more to do with me.

I followed him to the door thunderstruck, unable to reason under this terrible blow.

"What am I to do?" I asked, overtaking him on the pavement as he was about to step into the cab.

"Well, I advise you to be more careful in the future. It's a lucky thing for you that the

manager did not think it worth while to put the matter in the hands of the police."

In speechless dismay I watched the cab drive off, feeling that with it all hope was going beyond recall, and then, bewildered and helpless, I yielded to the stream of hurrying City men, and somehow drifted into a quiet turning, where it was possible for a poor creature to collect her scattered wits. Staring before me I saw the snowy plain, the desolate fir woods, and Gordon waiting there for the word that was to save him. Something must be done; it was impossible that he should wait there, hoping day after day for the message of deliverance till the last rouble had gone, and hunger and despair forced him to give himself up to the police. If the money was gone more must be found. But where was I to seek it? Who would help me? Whom could I apply to even for advice?

Stupidly in my desperation I looked round, as if I might find guidance at hand.

There was not a soul in the court but a man in a white blouse painting something on a door post. My heart sickened as I realised my folly. Then apathetically my eyes rested on the painter's hand. He was writing a name on the door post. I spelt out what he had written: "E. Pelham, solicitor, second fl—." A ray of hope flashed upon my darkened mind. I had heard Taras speak of getting a solicitor's advice upon some question of business. Might not this solicitor advise me? I had money to pay him —the rest of the English notes Gordon gave me. There could be no harm in trying, if I kept up my assumed character and took proper precautions. I went up to the second floor, and, after pausing for a minute outside the freshly painted door on which I read the name of the solicitor, I entered the office with every sense on the alert. I remember that the newly varnished door creaked as I pushed it open, that there was a strong smell of paint, that everything was painfully new; even Mr. Pelham himself seemed

new, he was so attentive, so anxious to get me into his inner office as soon as he learnt that I wished to have his advice upon an important question. He was a thin, eager little man, with a clean-shaven face and a pleasant bird-like expression in his sharp, twinkling eyes. He reminded me of a sparrow with a large brood on the look-out for the smallest crumbs.

"Do you know anyone named Kavanagh?" I asked, when we were seated face to face at his writing-table with the spotless blotting pad, and the new stationery case and writing materials between us.

"Well, madam, I can't say that I do," he answered reluctantly.

"Anyone named Gordon?"

"Gordon, Gordon, now," reflectively. "No, madam. You see, madam, my practice has up to now been in another part of the metropolis."

"Perhaps you know Prince Borgensky?"

"I have heard of him, of course, but I have not the pleasure of knowing him."

"Can I rely upon your not repeating a word of what I tell you to any living creature?"

"Absolutely, madam. You must understand that my professional reputation would be ruined if I betrayed, even by want of care, anything confided to me by a client."

After a few moments' reflection I said, going without circumlocution straight to my subject, "George Gordon and I were kidnapped last November."

"Kidnapped, yes, madam," he said in the most matter-of-fact voice, though the fall in his countenance expressed disappointment, and his penetrating glance betrayed a doubt as to whether his new client was quite in her sound senses.

"We were transported to St. Petersburg, and thence to Siberia."

"Siberia," he said, making a note of it, as though he might possibly confuse it with Cheapside.

"After travelling four weeks we escaped from the police and——"

"Pardon me—may I ask why you were in the hands of the police?"

"George Gordon was supposed to be Prince Borgensky, the Nihilist, whom he resembles, and I was taken as his accomplice. We were both being sent to Siberia as exiles by administrative order."

Mr. Pelham's face brightened up again as if with the dawning hope that I might be sane, after all.

"We found a man who undertook to get us out of Russia for about three thousand roubles. George Gordon had only twelve hundred. It was agreed that I should be sent alone to London with an order on George Gordon's bankers to pay three hundred pounds to a man named Lazarus, in Houndsditch. On receipt of the money Lazarus was to telegraph to the man in Siberia, who would then get George Gordon out of Russia. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, madam. The explanation is most lucid: the case most interesting. Pray proceed."

"I arrived in London this morning and presented the order to Mr. Lazarus. We took it to the bank, but they declined to pay the money."

"Has Mr. Lazarus returned the order to you?"

"Yes, here it is."

He examined the paper with redoubled interest.

"Messrs. Duncan and Duncan — why, this house is just round the corner."

"Yes."

"What reason do they give for refusing payment?"

"They say they have no money of George Gordon's."

"Is Mr. Gordon a man of capital?"

"He is very rich, I believe."

"Surely he would know when he wrote this

important order whether he had a balance there or not?"

"His life depended on it."

"If you have no objection I will go at once and see what the manager has to say on the subject. I shall not keep you waiting many minutes."

"You will not mention the names of Kavanagh or Prince Borgensky."

"You can rely implicitly on my prudence, madam," he said, taking up his hat.

After an absence of some minutes he returned with a piece of paper in his hand.

"The fact is clear, madam," said he. "The whole of the deposit, £5,423 17s. 6d., was drawn out on the 12th of last November. Messrs. Duncan could not make a mistake. On the other hand, it seems incredible that Mr. Gordon in a case of such importance could overlook the fact of drawing out so large a sum, especially as the odd figures prove that he was taking every available penny. Then you say he had only

twelve hundred roubles with him—a rouble, I believe, is worth about two shillings or half-a-crown?"

"Yes."

"Do you know whether he spent much money after leaving England?"

"He could not."

"And what day did you leave England?"

"The day he drew the money," I replied, misguided by the statement of the clerk.

"Is it possible that he drew the money knowing that he might need it?"

"He had no suspicion that he was to be taken away."

"And that was on the 12th of November?"

"Yes—that is, I think so."

"Ah, you are not sure?"

"No."

"Can you think of any incident that would fix the date?"

I tried in vain to remember a date.

"What did you do on that day?" he asked.

"Was it Sunday—did you go to church, for instance."

"No."

"The day before?"

"No."

"The day before that?" he said, perseveringly.

"The day before that I went to the Crystal Palace to see a display of fireworks."

"That would be the tenth—are you sure it was not still one day earlier, the ninth — the Prince of Wales's birthday?"

"It was the Prince of Wales's birthday; I am sure of that."

"And are you sure that only one day intervened between that and your departure?"

"Sure."

"Then," he exclaimed, springing up and going to his book-case—"unless the Prince's birthday fell on Sunday and was kept on Monday, there's an explanation to this mystery."

He took down a red-backed almanack from the shelf and, still looking in it, continued—

"No, the 9th was on Tuesday. This is particularly interesting," he added, returning to the table and wiping the moisture from his face.

"Now, madam," he pursued, after a few moments' reflection, "can you tell me if anyone besides yourself knew of Mr. Gordon's being taken away?"

"Yes, one person."

"Only one?"

"Only one."

"Can you tell me his name?"

After a little consideration I answered—

"His name is Kavanagh."

"Ah! Do you know in what relation they stand to each other?"

"George Gordon was Kavanagh's friend: Kavanagh was George Gordon's enemy. He it was who had us taken away."

"Most interesting—a complete chain! Did Kavanagh visit Mr. Gordon often?"

"Frequently before our arrest. He was at George Gordon's chambers the afternoon of that day."

"I do not know whether your suspicions take the same direction as mine; but it looks to me as if Kavanagh had got access to your friend's rooms after the kidnapping and made use of his cheque book. Has that occurred to you?"

"Not till now. But it was pointed out that some strong motive was needed to explain Kavanagh's action."

"A stronger still may yet be found. It is not likely that all Mr. Gordon's property was in the bank. Do you wish me to make inquiries?"

"No. It will be time enough to bring him to account when George Gordon returns."

"Then—hem—may I ask what you wish me to do?"

"I want you to tell me how I can get money to bring him home."

Evidently the poor little man found it difficult to conceal his disappointment at this dull

turn to an inspiriting case; however, putting the best face he could on the affair, he said—

"Do you know anything of Mr. Gordon's private affairs—the name of his solicitor—or any friend who can be appealed to for help?"

"No, I know of nobody who can be appealed to."

"You, yourself, have not the means?"

"I have barely twenty pounds."

He sighed, and after reflection said—

"Well, madam, the only thing I can think of is to see this Mr. Lazarus and represent the case to him, of course avoiding the names you have mentioned. He may be disposed to advance the sum required upon that order if we convince him that Mr. Gordon is a man of honour. With your permission I will call on him this afternoon, and you shall know the result to-morrow morning."

After some discussion I agreed to this proposal, and left Mr. Pelham, who declined to take any fee at the present stage of the case.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MADNESS OF FEAR.

I couldn't help it. It was stronger than I, as the French say—the yearning to be near Taras, to pass the house in which he lived—the house with which the dearest, the happiest associations of my life were connected; and after resisting the temptation as long as I could, wandering about the City with the endeavour to distract my thoughts by looking in the shops, I took a turning down to the river, and at the first station stepped on board a Chelsea steamer.

"Is it likely," I asked myself, "that I shall be seen by anyone I know?" Nevertheless it was the hope of seeing Taras, if but afar off, that led me into this imprudence, for, despite

my disguise, I knew that I was doing wrong—that I was jeopardising the escape of Gordon, the safety of Taras himself—by exposing myself even to this remote chance of discovery. Most of the people on board looked like Lambeth folk. A gentleman was waiting on the Temple pier who, in the distance, looked like Kavanagh.

I shivered with suppressed excitement as we drew nearer and nearer to the spot in which all my fondest hopes were centred. My heart beat wildly as I caught sight of the kilns beyond Westminster; my head swam, and every object grew dim and indistinct before my eyes, as the boat crossed towards Lambeth pier.

Prudence told me that here at least I ought to go below or screen myself, for every man on the pier knew me well by sight; but I was deaf to every voice, blind to every danger; I even raised my veil that I might better scan the faces of the passengers upon the pier we were nearing. Oh, if Taras might only be amongst them! If he would come on board where I might feel

his presence! There were three or four familiar faces close to me when we ran alongside, but not his. I stood up and strained my eyes as the late passengers ran down the foot bridge; he was not amongst them, and that vain hope was gone. But there was still the chance of seeing him at the window when the bridge was passed and I could get an unobstructed view of the house.

We passed under the bridge, snorting as the funnel was lowered, and then as the smoke blew away, something seemed to smite my heart like the blow of a great hammer. For, looking back, I saw the blinds of all the windows were drawn down.

"Great Heaven, Taras is dead!" That was my first thought, and then, divining the truth, I said to myself, "The Czar has conquered."

But this end of all happiness was too terrible to be accepted while any spark of doubt remained, and I tried to cheat myself with hopes

—as if mere belief could alter the course of inevitable fate, or hope undo what was done. I tried to explain the drawn blinds by supposing a less dreadful calamity. Poor old Mère Lucas was gone.

"Yes, yes," I said to myself, grasping at this possibility, "Mère Lucas is dead, poor soul!"

Leaving the boat at Vauxhall pier, I hurried along Millbank, repeating this phrase again and again like a charm, and, crossing Lambeth Bridge, drew near the old house, still striving to believe that my eyes had deceived me, yet faint with dread.

I could go no farther than the corner opposite the house; its aspect of desolation paralysed my limbs and forced me to cling to the wall for support. There was no sign of life in it. The shutters of the living room were closed; the blinds of the windows above drawn. The bulbs Taras gave me to plant in the boxes on my window sills the last week I was with

him had flowered and faded. The withered blooms hung over the edge; even the foliage had drooped for want of attention.

At the corner of Ferry Street one of the carmen from the pottery was packing jars in his van. Heedless of the risk I ran, for there seemed no longer any need of disguise, I tottered across the road, and in a voice made weak and tremulous by emotion, I asked him if he could tell me where Madame Lucas lived.

"Madame Lucas," he responded carelessly, still packing away the jars. "Oh, she's gone away. She used to live in the house down there as is shut up now. She's been gone ever since Christmas."

"Does—does anyone live there now?" I faltered.

"No. Look here, missis," he added, straightening himself and scratching his head, "you're upset my counting along of your questions. Here, Bill Wright," he called to a

young man who was arranging more jars against a wall, "here's a party wants to know something about Madame Lucas."

"I only wanted to know where I could find her," I said timidly.

"She's living now down in Surrey along with Mr. Taras," said William Wright.

"He is not dead?" I gasped.

"I haven't heard of his dying, mum; though I know he was very bad before he left."

My heart leaped at this. Oh, if Taras were only ill there was yet hope!

"Can you tell me where I can find him—Madame Lucas, I mean."

"I know it's Woking way where they live now. Betterford I think's the name of the place, but I can't be sure."

"Here," said the carman, "run round to the hoffice, old lady, and ask for Mr. Kavanagh. He knows. Hand us up them quarts, Bill."

At that name I recognised the rashness of my folly—albeit neither the carman nor William Wright had seen through my disguise—the reckless madness into which my fear had led me. Nevertheless, within an hour I was on my way to Betterford.

CHAPTER XLI.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

It was dark when I reached Woking. The ticket collector at the station told me that I had to go three good miles. He had heard there were new people at Betterford Grange, but didn't know their names, though he was told they were foreigners. The Grange was this side of the village, and the first house after passing the "Wheatsheaf," which was about half way, and I couldn't miss it, as it stood just on the edge of the common as you come through the fir woods. With this information I left him, and, following his direction, came at last upon the open common, and there, standing back from the road, was the Grange—its twisted chimneys and many gables

thrown into relief by a background of moonlit cloud.

The front faced the common. Looking through the iron gates up the yew-bordered carriage drive I saw a light on the lower floor. I felt that Taras was there. Clinging to the bars of the gate, I gazed at the light with such joy as I think they must feel who reach a shrine after long and weary pilgrimage.

I gave myself up to sentiment, and suffered my emotions to have unrestrained play. Solitude, the stillness of the night, the slowly creeping clouds that mounted the heavens, the feeling of unattained and yet attainable happiness—all conduced to this devotional ecstasy. Gradually my ideas took material form. He had been ill, but that was past—oh, I was certain now of that. What was he doing in the room there with the light? It was too late for dinner; probably he was reading. I seemed to see him in a cosy chair near the fire, his shoulder inclining towards the light, a book in his hand, smoking,

with that grave sweet look in his placid face which I knew so well. But he was alone, and the thought of his feeling such desolation as then touched my heart set me crying, so that the light was blurred and dim before my eyes.

"Ah, it will soon be over," I said to cheer myself; and then, brushing the tears away, I noticed how large the house was and how fine were the iron gates. There must be a big garden full of lovely flowers behind the dark hedge that bordered the walk; and there beyond was the fir wood through which I had come. Soon the ground would be covered with wild flowers like those he and I gathered when he took me to see the real country for the first time.

It would be delightful, ravishing, to live here —better than in Lambeth. Perhaps, now that his statue was finished, he would give up sculpture and work; he had fought a good fight against his enemy the Czar, and might afford to rest. Mère Lucas, too, would be happy here, where she could keep her linen clean, and not lose her

temper when salting day at the potteries came round. One day—not long hence if Mr. Lazarus would only yield quickly to the persuasions of my solicitor—I should go up that walk and see the inside of that quaint old-fashioned house. And I should have my own room in it, just as I had in Lambeth, only it would be still more beautiful—of course, supposing that I was careful, and committed no more imprudences such as I had allowed myself to be carried into to-day. No; that would not happen again. I would not give way to panic at the first fear that presented itself to my mind.

There my castle building came to an end, and the whole edifice toppled over before the whispering breath of misgiving. Something said to me—

"You are cheating yourself with false hope as you have cheated yourself with false fear. Nothing is certain but this—that you are standing here like an outcast at the gate of Paradise."

Taras was playing the viola in that room. A

low, sad sound reached my ear; it might have been celestial music—the mournful dirge of sorrowing sisters for one who could never enter Heaven—it was so pathetically beautiful. I listened in awe, not knowing that Taras played; and the sound rose like a cry of despair and fell in mournful cadence, filling my heart with such woe that I could bear it no longer, and turned away.

I found lodging that night at the "Wheatsheaf." Early in the morning I left the inn to return to London.

"It's a little better than two miles to the station," said the landlord; "but you will catch the up train nicely if you step out a bit brisk-like."

Anxious now to get back and learn the result of the solicitor's application to Mr. Lazarus, I ran, as soon as I turned the bend of the road, that I might not miss the train. But presently the sound of wheels behind obliged me to change

my pace to one more in keeping with the character of a grey-headed woman. The sound drew nearer and nearer; a couple of shaggy dogs raced by me, and then, as I turned my head, the carriage rattled past. It was an open carriage; a gentleman and a young lady sat on the back seat. She was on the further side, and speaking to him her face was towards me, his inclined towards her in a listening attitude. They did not notice me—the smile on their faces was unchanged—but at the sight of them I stopped as if lightning from the Heavens had shot down and struck me; for in that momentary glance I recognised both. He was Taras, she Judith! I stood by the roadside watching the receding carriage in blank dismay, till the curve of the road hid it from my sight.

What did it mean? I asked myself in a frenzy of jealous terror. Why was Judith by his side, smiling in his face? Had she taken my place, having lost Gordon? Had Taras given up all expectation of my return, and made

her his companion in my stead? Had he gone still further than that, and made her his wife? That was the more probable supposition. Judith was not a homeless, friendless waif, to whom such a position as I held could be given as the sole escape from destruction. With the conventional views of her class, she would consent to live under his roof only as his wife. True, I had heard again and again that Taras would never marry, but that supposed that he should continue to be a Nihilist; and I had already come to the conclusion that he had ceased to be an active member of that Society by his quitting Lambeth and retiring to this out-of-the-world spot. Had he ceased to be a Nihilist that he might marry Judith? I asked myself with envious jealousy. Had he taken this house for her? Were those two dogs bought for her? Was the old house at Lambeth only good enough for me? For some time this venomous envy rankled in my heart, and then the memory of his unstinted generosity to me brought with it a great wave

of remorse, and I burst into tears of shame for doing him this wrong. What was I to him? Why should he not marry a woman whom he loved as he could not love me? Had he not repaid a thousandfold all that I had done for him? Could he not cry "Quits," and follow the inclination of his heart? Where were they going now in that carriage? To the station, undoubtedly, and thence to London. I might see him again at the station if I hurried. But I did not stir from the spot. The thought of seeing him again, with her, cut my heart like a sharp knife. I felt it would be better for me if I never saw him again. Better for him, too.

But was he really married to Judith? It seemed incredible as my passion subsided. The belief was based only upon suspicion. I must find out the truth, and the sooner the better if I had to reconcile myself to irrevocable loss. Where could I get information? The people at the inn where I slept were new comers, and could tell me nothing about Betterford Grange

and its inhabitants. Suddenly it occurred to me that if Taras and Judith were gone to London, Mère Lucas would be alone. I might call upon her and make inquiries, taking care to conceal my identity and my purpose in case there might yet be necessity for concealment.

The iron gates were unfastened; I passed through and walked up the broad path to the house. There was no need to assume the infirmity of age: my steps faltered with quaking fear; my failing courage gave me scarcely the strength to ring the bell when I reached the house.

Through the glazed doors I saw Mère Lucas coming across the hall in response to my feeble summons, with ponderous step, her white cap, with the strings tied in a broad bow under her double chin, first catching my eye. She opened the door and greeted me with a serious inclination of the head, her full lip pursed up, and a slight expression of mistrust upon her face as

she took in my shrinking attitude and shabby appearance.

My back was to the light; she could not recognise me, and it was only natural that she should receive me in that manner, but the strangeness of it frightened me—I was so used to thinking of her beaming with kindness and genial warmth. Everything had changed so in these past few months that a return to the happy conditions of old seemed impossible.

I tried to recollect the phrases I had rehearsed for the occasion coming along, but my memory played me false; and, after stammering a few incoherent words in French and English, I abandoned the attempt to disguise myself in desperation, and cried in a broken voice—

"Oh, Mère Lucas, don't you remember me?"

She started—her lips fell—she turned me quickly to the light, and exclaimed—

"Mon Dieu! It has come to this. You have returned?"

For a minute astonishment bewildered her; the muscles of her face were agitated by conflicting emotions; then, recovering her self-possession, she composed her features, and with severe gravity told me that monsieur was not at home.

"I know he is not," I said. "I have seen him. He passed me in the road. I did not speak to him. I did not wish him to know me."

"One can understand that," she replied, significantly. "Has madame come to speak to me?"

"Yes, yes, Mère Lucas," I faltered piteously.

Her coldness and formality perplexed me. I could not understand why she called me "madame" now that I had revealed myself.

She led me into her own sitting room adjoining the kitchen and placed a chair for me. But I did not know how to approach the subject I wished to sound. All my pre-arranged device was thrown out of gear by the breaking down of disguise.

My embarrassment touched the good old woman, and she broke the painful silence.

"Monsieur is quite well?" she asked, with hesitation in her voice.

"Monsieur?" I echoed interrogatively.

"Monsieur Gordon."

"Yes, but it is a long time since I left him, and I have travelled a long, long way to come here, and I find everything changed and altered, and—" and, impulsively giving way to my feelings, I sobbed, "and I am wretched and unhappy."

I rose and went towards her, and she, springing up, broke through the barrier of reserve and clasped me in her arms, shedding tears of affectionate sympathy.

"Ah, my poor dear," she whimpered, "we are wretched and unhappy, all of us, and this is no time to bear grudges one against the other. My heart melted the moment you told me who you were, for I know how cruelly you must have suffered to come down to this. But I felt that I ought not to forgive you all at once for

deceiving us as you did; and, look you, it seemed as if you had no feeling for any of us, not to send one word to us in our trouble. No matter; that is all past, and we will forget it as best we can. There, there," she said, drawing me down on a chair close by her side, and nursing my hand on her knee; "we are friends again, but you must not expect me to feel just the same towards you as if nothing had happened." Then, catching sight of my loose-fitting, shabby gloves, she exclaimed in lugubrious pity, "Mon Dieu, what gloves!—and you who used to be so particular about your hands!"

"They are the best I have now," said I.

"Dear, dear! And that dress! One would say you had worn it for years."

"It was given me by a friend to come here."

"Ah, is it as bad as that with you! And I warrant she prided herself on her charity—that friend—in giving you what she would not wear herself. Poor dear! And you have spent all your money?"

"I have very little left."

"Well, well!" she ejaculated, raising her hands and letting them fall on her knees. Then, still surveying me with pitying astonishment, she said—"And is it true, my poor soul, that your hair has turned grey through all these hardships?"

"No—that is false hair. I don't want anyone to know me."

"No, no; of course not."

"I didn't intend to let you know me, but I could not help it."

"I promise you I will tell no one. No one shall hear a word of this from me—no, not even my poor master. And for a very good reason: it would break his heart to know that his little friend, as he used to call you, had come down so low. What a wreck!—what a ruin! And to think I am to blame for it all!"

"You?"

"Certainly. Didn't I do all in my power to throw you together? Did I ever let him go up

to see Monsieur Taras before he had gone into the front room to pay his respects to you? Didn't I flatter myself from the very first that he would make you his wife in the end?"

"He!—who?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Why, that Monsieur Gordon, to be sure. Whom else could I mean?"

I saw at last what was in Mère Lucas's mind, and the discovery took my breath away.

"And does Taras believe also that we eloped in that way—Mr. Gordon and I?"

Mère Lucas shrugged her shoulders, spread out her hands, subdued an involuntary chuckle that shook her abundant person, and then with becoming gravity replied—

"Mon Dieu! what else could he believe?"

"Taras thinks I left him to do that?" I murmured incredulously.

I fancy Mère Lucas thought I was now going a little too far; for she said in a tone of expostulation—

"Be reasonable, now it's all over, madame.

You must not expect too much. To be sure my dear master has never uttered a word that betrayed the slightest suspicion of your fault; but what could he think? You and Monsieur Gordon disappear the same evening without leaving a word behind you, and all that we ever hear of you afterwards is that Monsieur Gordon drew all his money out of the bank the day after your flight. For a week before he came to see you every day, and your behaviour was so odd as even to perplex me. You go out together one evening, and the next day you are so ill that any one could see something serious had happened—that some final arrangement had been made and some great event was about to take place. Come, come, madame! And how can one doubt what had happened when everything is done so secretly, and no word of excuse or pretence is sent to give things a respectable appearance afterwards, look you?"

CHAPTER XLII.

PAST EVENTS.

I SHOULD certainly have blurted out the whole truth to clear myself and Gordon from this monstrous imputation, but that, while I was pausing for the words to come, Mère Lucas said—

"One may live to be sixty, and yet be no wiser for it, look you. An old woman may mistake the good for the bad, and the bad for the good, like an inexperienced child. Look, for example, how shamefully I misjudged that good Monsieur Kavanagh."

Again that name brought me to my senses.

"Do you see Mr. Kavanagh often?" I asked.

"Oh, there's not a week passes but he comes down to spend a day or two with us. I don't

know what we should do without him in our misfortune."

I looked round, at a loss to know what misfortune she alluded to.

"It seems very pleasant here," I ventured to observe.

"Pleasant is not the word for it, my dear; it's a Paradise," she said in a most melancholy tone. "I should like you to see the rooms. They are beautiful, and it is no trouble to keep them nice; for here there is no dust, no smoke, no smuts, and the linen keeps its colour and does not need washing every day. And the garden!—it is a real picture already with spring flowers. And there are birds in every bush. That is one of the reasons why Monsieur Kavanagh bought it."

"Mr. Kavanagh bought it!" I said in perplexity.

"He bought it for my poor master, because, look you"—the old woman paused, her thick lips quivered, she put her apron to her eyes and

sobbed—"because he said he must go where he could hear birds."

I was touched by the old woman's grief, though still at a loss to understand the cause of it.

"And there's a kitchen garden," she pursued somewhat inconsequently. "The young radishes are ready for the table. To look at them gives one an appetite."

She dried her eyes, but in the same mournful voice continued—

"A poultry yard, too, and the fowls are laying more eggs than I know what to do with. Delicious eggs, with white like a curd. You saw the carriage?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur Kavanagh found that for us also, and Johnson the driver—a most obliging man who manages the garden, and is always willing to do anything for me."

She heaved a quivering sigh and shook her head mournfully.

"Perhaps you don't care for a country life?" I suggested.

"Mon Dieu! I would never leave it for an hour if I could help it."

"Do you find the house too large? Is there more than you can do?"

"Not a bit. The house is large, to be sure, but we only occupy part of it yet awhile. Monsieur Kavanagh said we must have plenty of rooms for friends when they come to see us. But up to now the master has not had the wish to invite many people here. It is enough for him to see Monsieur Kavanagh now and then, and to have Miss Judith to walk with him and tap the piano in the evening."

"Miss Judith!" They were not married, then. But my jealousy leapt into flame again as I learnt that Taras was satisfied with her society alone, and an envious pang shot through me to know that she had found a means of pleasing him that was beyond me.

"Does she play well?" I asked hoarsely.

Mère Lucas's lip twitched again.

"I can't tell you," said she. "When they begin to play music I go up to my room. It is more than I can bear."

"Is she always here?" I asked.

"She has been here ever since Christmas, and that was all through Monsieur Kavanagh. For, you see, she was a governess at his sister's, and he persuaded her to let Miss Judith come, seeing that the master could not do without someone. She has gone up to London to-day.

"I saw her."

"There are pigeons, too," Mère Lucas proceeded after a moment's sombre reflection. "I heard young ones squeaking up in the hay loft a week ago. I must ask Mr. Johnson to fetch them down for me when they're big enough for the spit. Yes, there is everything the imagination can desire here; but, Mon Dieu! what are all these things worth if one hasn't the heart to enjoy them?"

"But," I urged in perplexity, "why haven't you the heart?"

"Because it is living—because it has feeling in it," she replied fiercely. Then, seeing by my face that it was not want of feeling that made me dull, she said—

"You know what has happened to the master?"

"I know nothing. I came here to learn what has passed since I went away."

"You saw him this morning?"

"For a moment. He was smiling, I thought."

"What, my poor dear! You have heard nothing? It was in the papers."

"I have not seen any papers. I have been —a long way from England."

"Forgive me," she said earnestly, taking both my hands and looking with pity in my face—"forgive me. I thought you must know, and that your heart had grown hard and selfish, benumbed with its own pain. Oh, my dear

friend, if it is still sensible to the misfortunes of others, you have a terrible grief to bear. From my soul I pity you."

"Tell me all," I entreated.

"Mon Dieu! You shake like a leaf now. How can I soften the blow? What can I say to give you courage? How can I begin?"

"Tell me all," I repeated. "Begin from the day I went away."

"Our troubles began then, to be sure. I was surprised when I took in the breakfast that morning to find the master sitting alone. 'I am afraid mademoiselle feels unwell this morning,' said he. 'She was ill yesterday, and last night she did not come down to wish us "Good-night." See if she would like a cup of tea in her room.' Then I went up, and finding your room empty and the bed unused, I called the master, feeling that he must see this with his own eyes to believe it. He looked very grave, but less astonished than I expected. He only asked if I could tell whether any of your dresses were

missing? I found that your hat and jacket were gone. 'That shows that she has gone out,' said the master. 'We shall know more when she returns.' He said that to put an end to my questions, and went back to his breakfast as though it was quite natural you should go out and stay away all night. But when I cleared the things away I saw that he had not eaten anything. He was working in his atelier when Mr. Kavanagh came; that was in the afternoon. 'Good morning, madame,' says he as I open the door; 'is Monsieur Gordon here?' 'No, monsieur; he has not been here for two days, and that is droll, because he has lately been in the habit of calling regularly to see mademoiselle every morning.' 'Dear me!' says he, 'this is curious! for example, I went to his rooms this morning by appointment, and found that he went away last night and has not returned. He is not at his club, and, in fact, I cannot find him anywhere.' 'Mon Dieu! this is extraordinary,' says I; 'for mademoiselle went away last night

and has not yet returned.' 'At what hour?' 'It must have been before you left.' 'How very strange!' says he. 'Why, the hall porter at the chamber says that a young lady came to see Mr. Gordon last night about that time, and from his description it might have been mademoiselle. But, of course, it couldn't have been her, for they went out together arm in arm, and Monsieur Gordon had a large portmanteau with him.'"

"A portmanteau!" I exclaimed.

"The portmanteau in which he took away many things that belonged to him; for when his rooms were searched they were found all in disorder from the hasty preparations he had made for a long journey. But I have no need to tell you that."

"No, no; I don't want to hear anything about myself. Tell me about Taras."

"Ah, my poor master! That killed the joy in his heart; for, look you, he loved you more than you can have believed: more than I knew

—perhaps more than he knew himself. He was no longer merry and cheerful, as he had been; he did not sing when he came from his atelier. And the house was as if someone lay dead in it. It melted one's heart to see him sitting alone at the table. He would have your cover laid, and we spoke as if you were coming back soon. But, for my part, I felt that there was more unhappiness to come—that Providence had sent this warning to prepare us for still greater calamity. That was something more than superstition and the fancy of an old woman. Before the end of the month a second warning came. The master's work was destroyed for a second time."

"The group of statuary?"

"Yes—the beautiful group that he had toiled at so long and patiently. It was in the kiln; the master saw the fires lit, and stayed in the pottery till past midnight, watching the burning. I was sitting up, for he had eaten no dinner, and I had a hot supper to serve. Well, mon Dieu! he had scarcely seated himself at the table when

we heard a terrible crash, and a boy running in from the pottery cried out that the kiln had fallen in."

"Had it fallen in by accident?"

"No; for when the ruins were cleared away traces of dynamite were found. When Monsieur Kavanagh saw it he said, 'The mark of the Czar's hand is here: this has been done by the Russian police.' 'They have not beaten me yet,' replied my poor master; and that very day he began to model the group again. Then that good Monsieur Kavanagh prayed him to abandon the attempt, or at least to turn his efforts in some new direction, lest worse misfortunes should follow. I heard him say one day: 'These warnings are not to be mistaken. Next time these agents of the Czar—these hired assassins—may be ordered to destroy, not your work, but you.' 'Yes, that may be,' answered the master. 'If I do not yield the Czar will have me killed, perhaps; but the disgrace shall be on his side, not on mine.' And he shook his head to every

argument, working on to the last. Ah, how he worked! One could see that he had nothing else to live for, my poor master.

"But that was not for long. It seemed as if the Czar knew his intention, and had resolved to strike the blow before the work could be finished. One night—only a fortnight after the kiln had been destroyed—they came to the house, the assassins, and rang the bell. They must have known that I had gone up to bed, and that Taras himself would answer the ring——"

She broke off suddenly as the sound of wheels on the drive reached our ears. Taras had returned, and she went out to receive him, leaving me still in ignorance of the calamity that had befallen him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

WHAT HAD BEFALLEN TARAS.

I would have sprung up and retained Mère Lucas to learn the worst and end my suspense, but fear unnerved me, and made me powerless to move or act.

The carriage drew up before the door. I heard Mère Lucas's voice, and then Taras spoke in reply. I could not catch his words, but there was nothing in the tone of his voice to indicate that appalling change for which I had been prepared. What had the men—Kavanagh's agents—done to him that night when they called him to the door? Had they inflicted such injuries as to deprive him of reason? That was the greatest calamity I could imagine.

He was in the hall now. Every word he spoke was distinctly audible.

"Oh, there was plenty of time," he said; "we had nearly a quarter of an hour to wait before the train came in. The air is soft this morning. Spring has come again, mother. I will go in the garden till lunch time."

There was nothing in this to signify mental derangement; the only thing that struck me was that he spoke with less decision than of old, that there was an accent of dependence in his tone. And I observed that the sound of his footstep was not the same. At one time I should have distinguished it from a thousand; now I should not have known it for his. It had been firm and light and quick; now it was slow and heavy and shuffling, like the step of old age. Mère Lucas went out with him into the garden at the back of the house, passing so near the room where I sat that I heard the rustle of her skirt. Did he need her support that she accompanied him step by step? What

had they done to him? Was he maimed for life?

As their voices faded away suspense became intolerable. I stole cautiously out of the room and along the passage leading to the garden at the back. Approaching the door I perceived Mère Lucas coming alone across the lawn towards me. She saw me and raised her finger to bid me be silent; then stopping, she glanced back, raised her two hands, and let them fall in pity, and beckoned me to advance.

I went as far as the door, and there on the threshold I stopped spellbound. Taras sat on a garden seat on the opposite side of the lawn, his hands folded idly on his knee. It was strange to see him, so nervously active of old, sitting motionless without a book, a paper, or sketch-book in his hand—with nothing to occupy his eager mind; but it was not that which made my heart stand still. His face was turned directly towards me, and yet he took no notice of me. I moved forward a step, stretching out my hands

involuntarily, and still he sat unmoved and motionless. Then I knew what had befallen him—what those hired villains had done that night. He was blind; they had destroyed his eyes.

My emotion was too deep and terrible for tears: I could only stand there clasping my hands in an agony of pity.

The tears were running down Mère Lucas's cheeks as she came to my side and laid her hand in sympathy upon my arm. She would have led me away, but I shook my head, refusing to go.

"He will sit like that for hours," she whispered, "listening to the birds. It is all he can do."

Silently I crossed the lawn and dropped upon my knees before him, awe-stricken by his passive unconsciousness, his helplessness, and the calm, sad resignation in his noble face.

One of the dogs bounded across the lawn, gave an inquiring sniff at me, and then, wagging

his tail vigorously, approached Taras, and thrust his muzzle under the folded hands.

"What, Jack!" said Taras, passing his hand over the dog's head and patting his neck caressingly. "Come to see your old master? Want to tell me what is going on in the busy world?"

Jack sniffed a response and stood slowly waving his tail for a few moments; then he slipped away and trotted off, with a recollection, may be, of Mère Lucas and her kitchen.

I envied the dog who could relieve for a moment the awful monotony of that sightless existence; who could give expression to the feeling of boundless love and devotion, and win a responsive touch from his master's affectionate hand. By an uncontrollable desire I stretched out my hand, and for an instant touched his arm.

"Come back again?" he said, thinking the touch was Jack's; and he felt round and about for the dog, and, finding nothing, gently folded his hands upon his knee once more.

"Come back," I said to myself; "yes, I

have come back again, beloved master, to devote my life to you with more than a dog's fidelity—to lighten your burden if I may—to find my happiness in taking away from your sorrows."

In that sweet presence no bitter feeling could enter my heart; but when I left him my soul was stirred with vindictive passion, and a great craving for vengeance upon the remorseless villain who had wrecked the life of his friend possessed me. I vowed that Kavanagh should be brought to account, that he should suffer as he had made Taras suffer, and that if justice refused to punish him, then my hand should strike the blow.

This burning passion sharpened my wits, whipped up my flagging energy, and reanimated my courage. The necessity of secresy was more evident to me now than it had been hitherto.

"Mère Lucas and Taras both trust Kavanagh," I said to myself. "They see him frequently. If they should get the slightest inkling of the truth their manner would betray

it to Kavanagh. Even he could not maintain his hypocritical part. He would read at once that some knowledge of his villainy had come to their ears, even though they should doubt the truth of my statements and conclusions. He would at once suspect that either Gordon or I had found means to communicate with our friends, and he would take measures to outmatch us and save himself. If he intimated his fear of our escape to the police at St. Petersburg, increased vigilance on their part might prevent the return of Gordon; and all depended on his return.

"You will not betray me to anyone in the world?" I said to Mère Lucas.

"Is it possible, my poor friend?" she asked. "Is it likely that I should expose your misfortunes when I myself am chiefly to blame for all that has befallen you? Besides, you forget that I still love you, my dear. Nay, I will do anything in the world to help you."

"Could I stay here?" I asked eagerly,

seized with the unreasoning desire to live again under the same roof with Taras, and to watch him day by day, even if I might not speak to him.

"To be sure, my dear," answered Mère Lucas gladly. "There are half a dozen spare rooms, and the master has begged me again and again to have my cousin, Madame Leroy, down here. Who is to know you are not my cousin? Why, truly you may stay. Mademoiselle Judith will not be back before Saturday afternoon: that gives you two whole days."

"No more," I said with a sinking heart.

"Why, my dear, you may stay longer if you think it would be wise. But, look you, mademoiselle Judith has sharp eyes, and when one looks at you closely it is clear you are not so old as your grey hair. And mademoiselle has feelings like any other woman; so you can't expect her to look kindly on you, even if she consents to stay in the same house with you."

I saw how unreasonable, how impracticable,

my idea was; but for all that it was not easy to abandon it. My heart was wrung, not with mere womanly jealousy, but with a sense of my terrible loss. It was dreadful to think that another had taken my place in Taras's heart, and that I could do nothing for him, nothing whatever, at a time when a woman's love and sympathy were needed to brighten his long days of darkness. And my grief was not lessened by the reflection that I had lost all that was dear to me in trying to save him. At such a time one cannot feel that virtue is its own reward.

This was Wednesday. I promised that I would come again that evening or the next day; and then hurried off, eager to see Mr. Pelham and learn what chance there was of sending the money to Siberia.

My heart misgave me the moment I entered the solicitor's office. He was not nearly so eager to get me into his inner office as he had been the day before, nor so smilingly confident as when we parted; and there was a depressing

absence of enthusiasm as he closed the door and slowly seated himself at his writing table.

"I have seen Mr. Lazarus," he began, crossing his legs, clasping his hands on his knee, and gently twiddling one thumb round the other, "and I regret to say that he firmly declines to move in this affair until he receives the cash."

"But did you tell him that the money would certainly be paid?"

"Yes, madam. I spared no pains to convince him on that point. I even went so far as to assure him that the order was as safe as Government stock, and that I would guarantee the payment of a liberal bonus in consideration of the advance.

"What did he say to that?"

"Well, madam, he very pertinently asked why, if I were so sure of obtaining this advantage for him, I did not avail myself of the chance, and advance the three hundred on my own account."

"Ah, we never thought of that."

"It certainly had not entered into my calculations," observed Mr. Pelham with a serious shake of the head.

"Can't you advance the money?" I asked entreatingly.

"I could, of course; but there are two or three serious objections to that proceeding. One of these Mr. Lazarus pointed out in his particularly clear and business-like way. He said he had very little doubt about the genuineness of the affair, and knew that the money was to be employed in assisting the escape of an exile from Siberia; 'but,' said he, 'the escape may not be pulled off, and then where are you?' Obviously, if Mr. Gordon does not return, he cannot pay the sum advanced on his behalf—either capital or interest."

"We must find some other means of raising the money."

"Exactly the words of Mr. Lazarus—a most sensible man of business, and really quite

anxious to do what he can. 'Here is a telegram form,' said he; 'I have only to write the address and one little word on it, and send it, with three or four shillings to the nearest post office, and in less than an hour, perhaps, this exile may be on his way to London. That one little word shall be written and sent the moment I see the necessary indispensable three hundred pounds."

"Cannot you help me? Think," said I, "this friend's life and happiness are at stake. He must starve in the forest or give himself up if the money is not found."

The little gentleman uncrossed his legs, leant forward with his arms on the table, and looked at me in distressful hesitation. For a moment I thought he was about to yield and venture the payment out of his own little capital; then that bird-like, anxious look crept over his face, and he shook his head dolefully. I felt sure he was thinking of his family at home.

"It occurred to me last night, when I was thinking it over," he said, "that we might make

inquiries with a view to finding Mr. Gordon's solicitor and enlisting his services. But there is this objection. The man Kavanagh is so intimately acquainted with all Mr. Gordon's affairs that he could scarcely fail to hear of our proceedings, in which case there is not the slightest doubt that he would realise every available penny of Mr. Gordon's fortune and bolt with it."

If that had been the only result to fear I would have consented to the inquiry being made in order to procure the escape of Gordon; but there was a grave objection to giving Kavanagh a clue to discovery.

"Kavanagh must know nothing; it would be fatal," I said.

"Then we certainly must not make the inquiries."

"Can you suggest no other means?"

"None. I assure you it gives me great pain to withdraw from this most interesting case; but, in justice to you, I am bound to admit that I see no alternative."

"I must see Mr. Lazarus again myself," I said after some reflection.

"Do you think it advisable in the circumstances?" Mr. Pelham asked uneasily.

"It is my last chance."

"The chance of moving that gentleman from his decision is, I think, absolutely *nil;* but the chance of involving yourself in serious complications is great."

"How?"

"I am afraid, madam, Mr. Lazarus has not unlimited confidence in you."

"But I understood you to say the contrary."

"He told me, and, I believe, with perfect sincerity, that he was willing to believe every word you tell him when you produce the cash: at present he seems more disposed to regard you as a possible impostor."

"An impostor! Why?"

Mr. Pelham lifted his eyebrows, shook his head, and played with a paper-knife in silent

embarrassment for a moment or two; then, overcoming his reluctance, he replied—

"Friendly consideration compels me to tell you, madam, that your disguise is not—not quite what it should be. Sitting opposite to you in the cab, Mr. Lazarus observed on your way to Lombard Street that your hair was of two colours; he also observed that under the influence of emotion you spoke in a different tone of voice. These facts led him to surmise, when he heard that Mr. Gordon had no money in the bank, that you were trying to obtain money by false pretences; for though disguise may have been necessary to enable you to escape from Siberia, he saw no obligation for your keeping it up in London; and if you told him as much as you have told me—which I strongly advise you to avoid doing—he might still think that you were acting this part in complicity with Kavanagh. For these reasons, I should strongly advise you to keep away from Mr. Lazarus for the present."

"He—my friend Gordon—cannot be left to die out there!" I exclaimed in desperation.

"You mentioned another name in our last interview. If you would authorise me to apply to anyone—any friend who might advance the amount——"

He paused; but I made no reply. My thoughts were already turned in the direction he indicated. It seemed as if I must tell Taras, at all hazards; but might I not obtain the money from him without exposing Gordon to the risk of re-arrest at the frontier? The cloud that darkened my mind suddenly broke, and, brightening with the ray of hope, I started to my feet and said—

"There is a friend who will give me this money. I will ask him for it myself."

CHAPTER XLIV.

I MAKE MYSELF KNOWN TO TARAS.

I RETURNED to the Grange that evening. Mère Lucas, though she could not conceal the change in her sentiments towards me, did her best to make me feel at home in her sitting room and supply all my physical requirements. For the first time she permitted herself to sit down to table with me, and we shared the same dish that had come from her master's table. There was significance in this: in her opinion I ranked no longer in social distinction with Taras and Mademoiselle Judith.

"Fill your glass again, my dear," said she. "The master begrudges me nothing, as you know; and when I told him I expected Madame Leroy he bade me *fête* you."

Presently she left me to answer the dining-room bell. She returned with the coffee service, her under lip raised, and rueful misgivings in her face.

"He wants to see you," she whispered.

"'Tell Madame Leroy,' says he, 'that it will give me great pleasure if she will come in and talk to me.' I begged him to excuse you, as you have a headache, and are not fit for society to-night; but I do not see how you are to get out of it to-morrow. We ought to have thought of this beforehand."

"I have thought of it. I want to speak to him."

"Mon Dieu! I didn't think you had grown so hardy. Look you, you will have to mumble your words finely, or he will know you by your voice, and then what will happen?"

"If he cannot forgive me I must bear it," said I. "But whether he forgive me or not, I am sure he will never tell anyone of my disgrace, and that is all I fear."

"No, that is certain. You can count upon his saying nothing about you to anyone as surely as you can rely upon my silence. Nevertheless, it's as good as confessing everything to make yourself known to him. However," she added, with a sigh of satisfaction, "thank God, there's your clothes that I brought away from Lambeth upstairs in the press, and all your linen as sweet and clean as hands can make them."

Clean linen and a neat appearance were much more in accordance with her views of true repentance than sackcloth and ashes, and I doubt if she could have felt genuine respect for anyone in such a wayworn and bedraggled condition as mine.

Soon after breakfast the next morning she led me into the dining room where Taras was sitting, and having hastily introduced me as her cousin, Madame Leroy, she as speedily withdrew, leaving me to take the consequences upon my own shoulders.

After begging me to be seated, Taras said—

"We would have sent a trap to the station if we had known you were coming last night. It is a long way from the station. I hope you feel better this morning, madame."

I had intended to disguise my voice, but my heart revolted against deceiving my dear, stricken friend, and, after a moment's hesitation, in my natural voice I answered "Yes."

At that one word, faint as it was, he started, and turning his head slowly towards me—for he had mistaken my position in the room—he faced me. For a full minute he was silent, his closed eyelids quivering as if in conflict with the instinctive effort to penetrate the eternal shroud that hid me from him.

"Madame Leroy?" he said, interruptively, with emotion in his voice.

"Yes."

He bent his head to catch my response, and there was another pause.

"You have come alone, Madame Leroy?" he asked.

"Yes."

"There was no friend you cared to bring?"

"No."

These faltering monosyllables must have betrayed me, even if he doubted the evidence of my voice; but the belief that I wished to remain unrecognised was sufficient to withhold him from discovering his knowledge.

"You are going to stay with us, Madame Leroy?" he asked.

"No; I—I think of leaving this afternoon," I stammered.

He made no reply, but a look of pain came into his face, and I was silent, too, not having the courage to tell him why I had come. But he must have concluded that I was in trouble and in need of help, for presently, drawing some unopened letters from the inner pocket of his coat, he said—

"These letters came last night. Will you open them and tell me who they are from?"

They were from sympathising friends in

London. I read the names and addresses to him.

"Have you opened them all?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I hoped there was one from a friend—a dear friend of bygone days, from whom I have been hoping and expecting to hear by every post. Do you mind looking through them again?"

I understood his motive in giving me the letters now, and, seizing the opportunity, I asked him if it was from a poor woman in distress that he expected to hear—a nameless creature who dared not show her face.

"It cannot be my little friend," he said sadly; "she would not fear me. We were comrades, she and I, and should be still—companions in adversity. To think that I could judge her harshly is to judge me yet more harshly."

"She does not fear you, but she dreads those who have less charity."

"She is in trouble, you tell me; can I help her?"

"She hopes you will. Her happiness—more than she can tell you—depends on that?"

"Tell me what she wants."

"She is in need of money."

"Does her happiness depend on that?"

"Yes."

"You are sure she asks for nothing more than money?"

"Nothing."

He bowed his head as if to conceal the pain that came into his face; then quickly recovering himself he said gently—

"Poor soul, if money can make her happy she shall have it."

He rose, felt his way to a writing-table, and seated himself before it. From a drawer he took out a cheque-book, opened it, and passing his long, nervous fingers over the paper he slowly wrote his name in the right-hand corner. Then he tore out the cheque, and, returning to his former seat, gave it to me.

"I have left it open," he said. "Ask her

to write in—my unhappy little friend—the amount she needs; and tell her, in case she doubts it still, that her secret is safe in my keeping, and that she has made me happy by remembering me in her distress."

I took the cheque, faltering some incoherent words of gratitude.

"You will stay with us a day or two?" he asked.

"No; I must go away to-day."

"Have you far to go home?"

"I am going to London," I replied evasively.

"You are staying with friends there?"

"No; I have no friend to go to."

"And you are quite alone?"

"Quite."

He was silent for a moment, seeming greatly shocked by this discovery; then he said—

"But you have friends."

"None but Mère Lucas and——"

He held out his hand quickly, and as it closed on mine a smile broke over his face.

"And me," he said. "Oh, if my ear and reason deceived me the sense of touch would tell me whose hand this is I hold. Let us give up this game of crooked questions and cross answers and be ourselves. Have faith in me, little friend."

For some minutes we sat thus, with our hands locked, and neither spoke. Some such feeling of mingled joy and sympathetic sorrow as choked my utterance may have silenced him. Perhaps he was waiting for me to confide my sorrows to him; to pour out the history of past troubles, that he might give me comfort. But I dared not answer that silent appeal; and the tear that slipped from my cheek and fell upon his hand as I bent over it was all the confession I could make.

"Is there nothing I can do to help you?" he asked in a tone of deep agitation.

"Nothing—nothing more than you have done. No one can help me. I need no help now; the worst is past. Better days must come; then I may tell you more."

"I want to know no more than that," he answered impressively. "If the worst is past we will cease to think of it. Let us go in the garden," he added in a brighter tone as he rose to his feet; "the sun ought to be shining to-day."

He took my trembling arm. As we went to the door I glanced round the room. A book lay on the table, a paper knife marking the place where Judith had closed it. She had been reading aloud to him, perhaps. Some narcissus in a vase scented the air. She had placed them here for him. When we went into the hall I saw a pretty garden hat hanging on the stand. It was hers. There was a smile on Taras's face as he passed his hand lightly over it, seeking his own.

"I must have left my hat in the other room," he said, quitting my side to enter the drawing-room.

I followed him to the door and looked in. The piano was there, with Taras's viola case

beside it. The room was exquisitely furnished. I had never before seen any room like it. Oh! it was much more beautiful than our living room at Lambeth; and everywhere there was evidence of Judith's refined taste and of her occupations. By the window was a beautiful low chair, covered with delicate heliotrope satin, and beside it her work-table; a piece of embroidered silk was stretched on a frame; and there opposite was the old chair from Lambeth that Taras loved—his chair. It was here they spent their lives together—he and she. Even in her absence Taras found it pleasant to be there; that was evident by his having left his hat on the table. Perhaps he came and sat here in her absence because it reminded him of her.

He found his hat, and then I turned to the passage leading to the back of the house.

"You know the way?" he asked.

"Yes; I walked across the lawn yesterday."

"I knew it," he murmured. "Something touched my arm, and I felt that you were near.

I have been expecting you to come. What is it —a kind of clairvoyance, second sight, the development of a new faculty in place of the one that is gone, or is it simply the belief that one's most constant hope must be realised—the faith of a gambler after a run of ill luck that leads him to stake everything on the turning up of a single card? He's a poor player who throws up his hand under reverses. The luck is pretty equally distributed in this game of life: we get good and bad, but in the long run the balance is fairly level for those who have patience to play out to the end."

He said this, I thought, to encourage me; but the radiant happiness in his face surprised me, though I knew the vigour and fortitude of his character. One would not have imagined, but for those poor closed eyes, that he had lost the most precious gift of Nature.

"Yes," said I; "at the worst of times one can always find something to hope for—though it be only forgetfulness."

"Always; and forgetfulness, I fancy, is a trick that one can learn with a little practice. It's only the knack of looking steadfastly ahead and resisting the temptation to look back. That seems to me the most melancholy folly—looking back. If the retrospect is pleasant, the road before you—the one you must travel to reach your journey's end—suffers by comparison; and if it is terrible, you run the risk of losing heart before the possibility of worse difficulties to come. I have heard that in mountain-climbing the guides at certain points warn the novice against turning round, for fear he should be seized with vertigo and fall. We won't look back, for the simple reason that it is pleasant to look forward—at least, I hope you find it so."

"Yes, it is true what you said—one must only look forward. It breaks one's heart to think of what is lost. One can do nothing to be better—nothing at all good and useful in such misery."

He pressed my arm to his side, and spoke

some wise words of assurance and encouragement, adding—

"We have both had our misfortunes, little friend."

"I think too much of my own."

"Mine," he said to turn my thoughts, "is not so great as you would think. At first it was hard to bear; the world seemed so empty. But I am learning to see now without my eyes; and I find a multitude of beautiful things that had before escaped my notice. I never weary of sitting here and listening — puzzling out where all the sounds come from and making a better acquaintance with the hidden world."

"And in the evening you have Miss Bell to read to you and play."

"Yes; she is a good, amiable girl, wonderfully patient and untiring."

There was a great whir of wings over our heads, startling me for the moment; and then six or eight beautiful pigeons fluttered down and settled on Taras's shoulder and outstretched

arm. He gave them a handful of maize from his pocket, and they clustered about his hand with outstretched wings to take the grain.

"Do they come down to Miss Bell like that?" I asked with envy.

"They will come to anyone who has something to give them," he said smiling.

I wondered if he regarded me in the same light.

I held out my hand timidly to the pretty, fluttering birds; but they had swallowed the last grain, and they took to their wings and flew away in a body.

I could bear it no longer; the pain at my heart was greater than I could endure.

"I must go away too," I said, choking down my grief.

CHAPTER XLV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Taras would have had me take his carriage to the station; but I refused. I wanted to be quite alone, that I might relieve my heart of its burden in an unrestrained flow of tears. And as soon as I got away from the gates of the Grange they came—those welcome tears—and, blinded, I stumbled along the road with down-bent head.

When the paroxysm was past I tried to think of the future; but even the prospect of bringing Gordon back and removing the illusion that must have lessened Taras's respect and affection for me failed to lighten my spirits. Could the old tie ever be renewed? Would Taras ever again feel as he had felt towards me?

Had he not already given his heart to Judith? I asked. Then the figure of George Gordon, as I had seen him at the last moment standing under the dark pines waving his hand in a cheerful farewell, rose before my imagination; and at the thought of his bitter disappointment in finding that Judith had transferred her love to Taras —as I felt she must have done, living for so long in close companionship with him—of his experiencing such bitter anguish and regret as this which tore my heart, I asked if it would not be almost more merciful to leave him there in ignorance of this greater misery. But the thought of doing my duty urged me on and overcame these hesitating doubts.

Mr. Pelham had given the finishing touch of newness to his office by the addition of a new clerk, who, when I entered, was engaged in addressing circulars at his desk. After taking my name, which I gave as Madame Leroy, this young man led me into the inner office, where I

found Mr. Pelham waiting for clients to come with the patience of a spider on the look-out for stray flies, as it seemed to me.

"I have got it," I said triumphantly, as I laid the cheque before him.

"I am delighted to hear it, madam. You wish me to go with you to Mr. Lazarus and see this affair through—always the most advisable course in a transaction where proof of payment may be needed. No time is to be lost. I——" His enthusiasm was abruptly checked and his countenance fell as he glanced down at the cheque he had unfolded. "But this is not filled in, madam."

"That is why I came to you first. I'm to write in the amount, and I want you to show me how to do it."

"I perceive," he said, but in a dubious tone; and then, as if anticipating a repetition of the difficulty that prevented the cashing of Gordon's order, he added, "It will be advisable, perhaps, to take this to the bank before we see

Mr. Lazarus. Business men are so particular, you know."

His spirits quickly rose again, however, as I filled up the cheque according to his directions, the prospect of handling money being, I think, as agreeable to him as to Mr. Lazarus himself; and when I had done, he rose briskly and took his hat from the peg on the wall.

"Oh, by the way," he said, coming back to the table and opening a drawer, "can you tell me if your Mr. Kavanagh has an office in Lambeth?"

"In Lambeth? Not to my knowledge."

"Ah, then, it is a singular coincidence, and nothing more. My clerk," he explained, "is engaged in addressing circulars to certain capitalists respecting a company that is being formed. This envelope was amongst them; and the name catching my eye—your interesting case is continually in my mind—I looked in the Directory, and found to my astonishment that the office to

which this letter is addressed was occupied by Messrs. Bell and Gordon. I say *was* advisedly—because the Directory was compiled last autumn. Now the association of these two names——"

"The Old Lambeth Pottery?" I interrupted.

"Yes; that is the address."

"That may be Kavanagh's address now. What is inside the envelope?" I asked eagerly.

"We will see."

He opened it.

"Only a circular. If you think there may be more in this than mere coincidence, I will question Mr. Brett before you—here, now, if you please."

"Yes," said I, feeling that I could not rest in uncertainty as to the extent of the clerk's connection with Kavanagh.

Mr. Pelham placed a chair for me where I could sit with my back to the window and touched the bell on the table. The new clerk came to the door.

"Come in, Mr. Brett," said the solicitor.

"I saw a circular addressed to a Mr. Kavanagh, Old Lambeth Pottery. Do you know him?"

"Client of my late employers, Evans and Evans, sir."

"You don't know him personally?"

The clerk shook his head with a smile.

"A little too high up for that, sir," said he. "A gentleman of fortune—holds a post in the House, I believe."

"He speculates, of course?"

"Not sure, sir. I know he has bought up two or three little potteries."

"What potteries?"

"Well, there's the Old Lambeth; but he took that up, I believe, more from charity than as a paying concern."

"But the Old Lambeth—why, that's Bell and Gordon's, surely."

"Was, sir, before Mr. Gordon bolted."

"Mr. Gordon bolted!" exclaimed the solicitor in a tone of incredulous astonishment. "Why, this is the first I have heard of it."

"Last November. A young lady in the case, I believe," said the clerk with a mild grin, which he would certainly have kept for another occasion had he suspected that I was the young lady in question. "Don't know much about that; but I do know that he left his affairs in a regular muddle and behaved shamefully towards his partner, poor old Colonel Bell."

"This is bad news, madam," said Mr. Pelham, turning to me with a grave shake of the head. "In what way did he behave shamefully, Mr. Brett?"

"Took Colonel Bell into partnership and invested in a pottery that was worth nothing at all; incurred considerable debt in building kilns and improving the place, and then, when he found that the colonel's affairs were not so good as he expected, he realised what he could and bolted, leaving this poor old gentleman to get out of his difficulties as he could."

"Ah, well, what happened then?"

"Things went worse and worse with the colonel. The kiln that he still had to pay for fell in the first time it was fired; then, to meet his creditors, the poor old fellow tried to raise money on some mining stock, and found the shares worth nothing. Mr. Kavanagh introduced him to us, and I had to go into the affair, so I know all about it."

"And the result of your examination showed——"

"Showed that Colonel Bell had not sixpence in the pound to pay his creditors."

"But he could call upon his partner, Mr. Gordon."

"Couldn't find him—not a trace of him anywhere; and his solicitor—Cunningham, of Lincoln's Inn—refused to produce a penny without his order, naturally."

"Oh, Mr. Gordon has means, then?"

"Plenty; but it's all tied up. No one can touch it until he is found or an order is obtained from the Court of Bankruptcy."

"Dear me! And what did Colonel Bell do in that emergency?"

"Just what might be expected of an honourable old gentleman and a bad man of business—sold up all his private property and paid over every penny to the creditors of Bell and Gordon. Evans and Evans did their utmost to prevent him making such a disastrous sacrifice, and advised him to declare himself bankrupt at once. But he would not be persuaded. Yielding in most things he was as stubborn as—as anything on this. Old-fashioned notions, you know, sir, about honour and the disgrace of being whitewashed."

"Of course, the sum realised was insufficient to satisfy the creditors of the firm?"

"Didn't satisfy a quarter of them, and left him without funds to work the business. That was foreseen by Evans and Evans, who told the obstinate old fellow that he was only throwing his money away and postponing the evil day."

"So that after all he had to close the works and declare himself insolvent?"

"He would have had to do so to a dead certainty, but just at the last moment Mr. Kavanagh came forward and lent him a sum of money to clear off the debt, rebuild the kiln, and start afresh."

"Did Mr. Kavanagh advance the money without security?"

"Not exactly, sir; he took a mortgage on the estate."

"I don't see any great generosity, Mr. Brett, in advancing money on a mortgage."

"There was in this case, sir. Evans and Evans had thought of raising money by a mortgage, but on looking into the deed of partnership they found an impediment in the way. Mr. Gordon could repudiate any obligation made without his consent."

"I see, Mr. Kavanagh relies upon Mr. Gordon fulfilling the obligation when he returns?"

"Just so, sir. And, considering all things, that's not very good security."

"Supposing Mr. Gordon should not trouble himself to return—what then, Mr. Brett?"

"Then Mr. Kavanagh will come out all right. Every farthing the gallant old colonel can screw out of the affair is made over to Mr. Kavanagh's account towards payment of the mortgage, and if he only has time he will certainly clear it off. The business is looking up at the pottery now; three kilns are in working order."

"I think you said that Mr. Kavanagh has invested capital in other potteries?"

"Two or three small ones. He snapped them up the moment be heard that Hintons were going to turn their business into a company, knowing that the first object of the company would be to extend the works, which could only be done by buying up these potteries. And the result proved the justice of his forethought. The company would give

him a cheque for the whole lot at a day's notice."

"And transfer the mortgage on Bell and Gordon's pottery?"

"Oh, yes; they would take the risk of pulling that through all right. A young company, you know, sir, does not stick at trifles."

"And if the company chose to foreclose—as I suppose they would—Mr. Bell would be forced to abandon everything and go in the workhouse?"

"Oh, of course, as a man of honour, Mr. Kavanagh would indemnify him out of the handsome profit he must make on the speculation."

"Just so, as a man of honour, he would," assented Mr. Pelham; and then, turning to me, with a slightest indication of a wink, he said, in a tone of assurance, "Well, madam, you see your money is quite safe. Thank you, Mr. Brett. If anyone calls you can say that I shall be back in an hour."

The cab that had brought me from

Waterloo stood at the door. We got in, and Mr. Pelham having directed the driver, said, as he took the seat beside me—

"I conclude the persons referred to by Mr. Brett are the same that you are acquainted with, madam?"

"Yes, they are the same."

"Well, you see how matters stand."

"I think I understand what he said."

Of course a great deal was less clear to me then than I have tried to make it in this narrative.

"It's pretty clear that Kavanagh is getting all his eggs in one basket for the convenience of selling out and bolting at a moment's notice. All these arrangements are clearly made with a view to the possibility of Mr. Gordon's return. I need not impress upon you the tremendous importance of secrecy. The merest suspicion on his part that you are here will involve a catastrophe There's one thing I can't quite make out," he continued, reflectively, after a pause of

some minutes, "and that is why he has not made his position still more secure by accepting at once the offer made by this company. He must know as well as most people the value of a bird in the hand. It isn't likely that a man who has shown himself devoid of principle and feeling should be restrained by consideration for an old man—that he should jeopardise his own future, though only in a slight measure, merely to keep Colonel Bell out of the workhouse. I think we shall find that he has some stronger motive for this delay."

When the cab stopped Mr. Pelham left me and took the cheque into the bank; in a few minutes he returned with a jubilant expression in his face.

"It is perfectly correct," he said, stepping briskly into the cab. Then he directed the cabman to drive to Houndsditch, and as we rattled on proceeded to count over the bundle of notes caressingly, as if the touch of the crisp paper was a real pleasure to him.

Mr. Lazarus received us with unctuous civility, and having counted over the notes in his turn, opened a drawer and brought out the letter from Peter Schemyl, which he carefully read through once more.

"You have come only just in time, my dear lady," said he, as he began to fill up a telegram form. "Mr. Schemyl leaves Moscow to-morrow."

"But my friends are not in Moscow," I said.

"No, they are at Vorontskaya, I suppose. It would never do for Mr. Schemyl to receive a telegram there from London. Do you know whom he left in charge of the post-house when he came away?"

"His brother Borgis, I think."

"Ah, a clever man Mr. Borgis Schemyl, very clever. I congratulate you—one of the cleverest men in the business. He will get a telegram from his brother at Moscow to-morrow in all probability, and put your friends well on the road before Mr. Schemyl returns."

"You think they will get away safely?" I asked anxiously.

"There's every hope if Mr. Borgis has the management. The only difficulty will be in crossing the frontier; but if you have no enemies here who are likely to warn the police you may reasonably expect to see your friends in three or four weeks' time."

Commenting on this interview as we left Carter Street, Mr. Pelham said—

"Everything points to the necessity — the vital necessity—of keeping Kavanagh in ignorance of your escape. Even when Mr. Gordon returns Kavanagh ought not to know it before we have obtained an order for his arrest. At the first intimation of danger he will try to slip through our fingers. Now, where is Mr. Gordon likely to go when he reaches London?"

"To Lambeth," I replied without hesitation.

"Why, that is the very place he ought to avoid. Can you think of no means of communicating with him before he arrives here?"

After a moment's consideration, I said that it was probable he would call upon the people who had helped me in Berlin—Mr. Hoffman and his wife.

"Considering all things—— Excuse me, madam," he broke off with an apologetic cough, "but your hair behind has worked a little on one side. Considering all things, as I was about to remark," he continued when I had replaced the false hair, "do not you think it would be advisable to go to Berlin and wait there with these friends until Mr. Gordon comes?"

"No," I said; "I could not do that. I must be in England. I will write to Berlin: that will answer the same purpose."

He shook his head doubtfully and glanced nervously at my treacherous knot. I too felt that it would be wiser to go away; but I could not reconcile myself to the idea of going so far from Taras, even for a few weeks, little as I had to hope in staying near him.

"May I ask where I may write to you in

case I have anything of importance to communicate?"

"I will let you have an address. I do not know yet where I shall stay. I think near Woking."

"Woking. Of course, you have no reason to suspect that Mr. Kavanagh might by chance go to Woking?"

"I know he passes through the town occasionally; but," I added hastily to allay the alarm expressed in the little solicitor's face, "the place I thought of staying at is a roadside inn quite out of the town, where he would never think of stopping."

"Still, many people visit a roadside inn. You could not stay always in one room out of sight, and—excuse my saying so—your appearance might excite curiosity and give rise to gossip, which would be in the highest degree undesirable. I positively think, madam, that out of respect to the gentleman who has advanced this money——"

"I will not go there," I said, already convinced of the folly of yielding to a merely morbid and sentimental motive. "Tell me what I ought to do and I will do it."

"Have you any idea where Mr. Kavanagh lives?"

"At Sydenham, I think."

"Ah, well if you took a lodging at Stoke Newington, say, I think you would be perfectly safe—especially if you laid aside your disguise."

I felt sure my hair had gone wrong again.

"And what shall I do then?" I asked, feeling that the long period of suspense would be intolerable without some occupation to divert my thoughts.

"What should you have done at Woking, madam?" Mr. Pelham asked pertinently.

"I think I should have walked a great deal in the woods."

"Unfortunately, there are no woods at Stoke Newington; but there are other attractions for

a lady. There are shops and—are you fond of music?"

"Music!" I echoed jumping at the suggestion. "That is the very thing. I want to learn the piano."

"In that case I think I can suggest the very thing that would meet all requirements. I have a sister living there who gives lessons in pianoforte playing. She would be happy to give you board and lodging, and there would be no necessity for explanations, which might be required elsewhere. I myself live at Stoke Newington; and if it is agreeable to you we will go at once to my sister Janet and arrange the affair."

I accepted this offer eagerly; for the notion of learning music fired my imagination with the wildest hopes. In my ignorance I thought that by working all day I might in a month be able to play as well as Judith Bell. And that night I took up my quarters under the roof of Miss Janet Pelham.

CHAPTER XLVI.

I DISCOVER THE FIRST CAUSE OF KAVANAGH'S VILLAINY.

Miss Janet Pelham was the dearest little old maid that ever lived. She had the bird-like alacrity and cheerfulness of her brother, but with a sweet and amiable disposition, which was less perceptible in his character, because of the restraint imposed by considerations of professional etiquette, may be. But indulgent as her nature was, Miss Pelham could not permit me to practise scales on Sunday. Possibly she felt for her neighbours; for the walls were thin, and they certainly heard enough strumming for six days of the week to entitle them to a day's rest on the seventh. But the inaction that was a godsend to them was intolerable to me; and so

on the second Sunday I put a little parcel of provisions, which I had bought over night, in my pocket and left Stoke Newington at an early hour.

There was but one place in the world that had any attraction for me, and that was Betterford; and with a wild feeling of freedom and hope, heightened by my love of adventure and the sense of the risk I ran, I took the first train from Waterloo to Woking.

I was alone in the compartment when the train started, and taking advantage of this opportunity, I carefully pinned on the pieces of false hair I had brought with me and put on the thick, spotted veil to complete the disguise.

I think I have said that a fir wood lies at the back of the Grange; it slopes down to the common, and from a path winding round the hill one obtains at a certain point an unobstructed view of the Grange and its surrounding grounds below. A seat has been fixed there, for

this opening commands one of the finest views in Surrey, the undulating country spreading out beyond the common as far as the eye can reach.

It took me by surprise when I looked down and saw the Grange lying open to my observation below; it seemed as if something more than hazard had guided me to this spot.

"It must be lunch time," I said to myself, seeing no one in the garden. "I am hungry, too. Perhaps by the time I have eaten my lunch Taras will have finished his; then he will come out to smoke a cigar and look into that wonderful world he spoke of."

I sat down and ate the sandwiches I had brought; then, after waiting with eager hope and expectation for about half an hour, my heart bounded as Taras came out from the house and walked slowly over the lawn. He was not alone; a thin old gentleman walked by his side. I knew Taras the moment I saw him, but it was some time before I felt certain that his companion was Colonel Bell. Instinctively I drew

aside, screening myself behind a bramble. It was not likely that the old gentleman would descry me at that distance; still less that, perceiving me, he could recognise who I was. Presently a young lady with a sunshade appeared, immediately followed by a gentleman. Him I knew at the first glance to be Kavanagh by his height, carriage, and smart appearance. They crossed the lawn to Taras and Colonel Bell, and a few minutes after sauntered away, disappearing beyond the shrubbery that hedged the lawn. I was glad when she went away; for I knew it must be Judith, though her sunshade concealed her head and face from me. While she was there only a feeling of jealousy embittered my thoughts; when she was gone my heart beat more calmly, and I could look down upon my dear friend with that tender sentiment which I had made this pilgrimage to indulge in.

Mère Lucas brought out a glittering liqueur set and a box of cigars, and set them on a table

before the garden seat. Even there I could hear her laugh. These and many other trifling incidents I noticed with untiring interest until the sound of voices startled me from my reverie, and looking downwards I perceived, through the intervening growth, a bright speck of colour. It was the sunshade I had seen in the garden. Judith and Kavanagh were coming up through the wood by the winding path. I stepped back noiselessly and looked round for a hiding-place, not knowing by which path to escape meeting them. A deep trench bordered the inner side of the path, overgrown in parts by straggling brambles and dead brake. I crept round the seat and dropped in the trench behind it, thinking that I should be secure there while they passed. It was not likely that they would stop to pry into the ditch at the back of the seat. They had ceased to talk, but as they drew nearer and nearer I heard the sound of their footsteps; I could see nothing but the banks and the loose growth about me. The sound

ceased, and then, quite close, I heard Kavanagh exclaim in admiration—

"By Jove, what a glorious view!"

"This is my favourite walk. When it is fine we come and sit here for a time," Judith answered.

"A pleasant suggestion. Shall we rest a bit?"

I heard the rustle of Judith's skirts as she seated herself, and then Kavanagh speaking again—

"Ah; there's the Grange below there, and Taras with your father."

"Poor papa! Even from here I see the change in him. He used to sit so erect."

"It's that detestable office. He sticks at it too close. He is there bending over his desk from morning till night. It is too much for a man of his age. Why should he do it? A lad at fifteen shillings a week could manage the work he does."

"Happily, he does not know that."

"Unhappily, I think he does. That blundering idiot, the accountant, made it clear to him that his share in the business is practically *nil;* and knowing that, but little persuasion is needed to make him retire."

"How can he retire if he has nothing?"

"He might have all he needs."

"You are thinking of Taras's generous offer."

"No; I know your father's character too well to believe that he would accept any offer from Taras or from me that carries the smack of charity with it. It is only from his daughter that he could take a gift and still feel independent. You owe him still for all he has bestowed on you."

"When the trouble came last year I gave up all I had saved. It barely covered the house debts. I cannot rely on receiving to the end of papa's life the salary Taras pays me. It is more than I ought to take. I know that, but I have sacrificed my own little share of pride with this very hope you point to. Oh, I have thought of

it over and over again. But how can I give papa a home when my own future is so uncertain? It would be dreadful to take him away from business and then find that I had not enough to support him."

"But your own future need not be an uncertain one. You have it in your power to offer him a home and surroundings as pleasant as the Grange below there—a home in which you might be to him what you are now to Taras."

"I could do this—I!" she murmured, in a tone of bewildered surprise. Then, after a moment's pause, she exclaimed in expostulation, "Mr. Kavanagh!"

"No, I cannot let this hand go until you have heard me out, and I know whether there is hope for me or not," he answered, with low and passionate firmness. "It is time to speak; I have been silent as long as silence was endurable —masking my feelings towards you as only one with my earnest desire could. I love you, Judith! I have loved you for more than a year

—from the first day I met you. I loved you hopelessly until George Gordon threw away the treasure that his soul was too base to value. Since then I have built every hope upon the possibility of making you my wife."

In that instant it flashed upon me that here was the secret motive for which we had been searching—a motive stronger than avarice. It was to rob George Gordon of his sweetheart and his fortune that we had been kidnapped and sent to Siberia.

CHAPTER XLVII.

PREPARING FOR POSSIBILITIES.

"Oh, I cannot marry!" said Judith, her voice betraying extreme agitation.

"With Gordon's infidelity fresh in your memory the idea of marriage must have been repugnant to you," Kavanagh replied. "For that reason I have subdued the natural impulse of my heart and controlled the expression of my dearest hopes, even to the extent, I fear, of seeming reserved and cold. If Gordon were dead, and had died faithful to you, I should feel that his memory was still a bar which respect for widowed love forbade me to pass. But the proofs of his preference for a worthless woman, of his heartless treachery towards you, must long

ago have extinguished every spark of affection you felt for him, or I am utterly mistaken in your character. No; I would rather have you refuse to be my wife for another cause, much as that other cause would strain the bonds of a dear friendship."

"That other cause—I do not understand you quite now."

"I will speak plainly, though I betray my own weakness. I am jealous of Taras. I have been jealous of him since you came here, and this feeling has grown, not without reason, until it is too great to be concealed. It urges me on to this last point. I can be silent no longer—hide my passion no more. I must speak and end the torment in which I live. The vitriol that was thrown into his eyes is nothing to the corroding venom that scars my very soul and blinds my reason when I see him take your hand——"

"Oh, Mr. Kavanagh!"

"No, no—you must hear me out now that

I speak, for it may be the last time. You are all in all to Taras. You are with him every hour of the day. He loves you—you must know that."

"If I knew that I should not, I could not, stay with him."

"Tell me that again," he said eagerly, "for if you do not know that it is because you do not love him."

"He does not love me. If I thought it necessary to defend myself, I could tell you why."

"I do not ask for explanations. It is enough for me that you say it is so, and I thank God for it. Forgive me if I have offended you. You *must* forgive me, knowing how deep my passion is by the mad lengths to which it has led me. Look in my face—see how my hand trembles. Oh, if you knew, as one day I hope you shall know, what I have done to make you mine——" He paused as if perceiving that his passion had brought him to the edge of an abyss.

"You frighten me. Let us go. You hurt my hand," Judith said in pain.

"It is past. See, I am a rational being again now. There, you are free to leave me if you will; but, for pity's sake, give me an answer now. I swear to abide by your decision, and if you bid me go I will go, and you shall never see my face again. You have told me you cannot marry, but not why."

"I do not know. It may be only sentiment that makes it seem impossible—a feeling that I ought not to marry."

"If it be only sentiment, reason will in time prevail. Take time to consider my offer. It is too grave a question to be decided in one moment. Until now the idea of being my wife has not presented itself to your imagination."

"Indeed, it has never entered my thoughts. I have regarded you always as a friend—a most generous and loyal friend; but not—not——"

"Not as a lover. No; my manner is against me. Flirtation is odious to me. Love seems to me too great a thing to be frittered away. A man should have one passion and no more: a grand passion to which all ends are subjected, and such a love I offer you. Think of me during the coming week, not as a friend only, but as a lover, and next Sunday let me know my fate. I ask you now only to promise me that."

"I promise," said Judith faintly.

"With all my soul I thank you. Rest assured that I shall not attempt to alter your decision. It shall be final. If you tell me that you cannot be my wife, I shall throw up everything on the morrow and leave England for ever. Come, let us go back mere friends as we came. Your father is still there—see?"

Judith made no answer. She may have been thinking, as doubtless Kavanagh intended she should think, of what would befall her father if she refused to marry.

I thought it advisable to tell Mr. Pelham of the discovery I had made, or, at least, part of it, and that, I confess, not the least important part in my estimation. An opportunity occurred that evening.

Mr. Pelham had brought his sister home from church, and, being induced to stay to supper with us, we were left together while the precise Miss Janet was changing her church-going dress upstairs.

"I am delighted to see you looking so well," said he, smiling, as he seated himself opposite to me and drew off his gloves. "You look ten years younger than when I saw you last Tuesday."

"I feel ten years younger," I replied; indeed, I had not felt so happy and hopeful since the day I returned to London. "I have been in the country to-day, and—and I have something to tell you."

"It must be good news to have made such an effect upon you."

"It is good news. Oh, better than any I have dared to hope for!" I said, thinking only of Judith's positive assurance that Taras did not love her. "I have found out Kavanagh's motive —a motive that explains every act of villainy he has committed."

"That is a very satisfactory discovery. At any rate, it is to me; for, as you may recollect, I intimated that some special purpose must have induced him to take Colonel Bell's affairs in hand."

"He had a special purpose. He is in love with Mr. Bell's daughter, Judith, who was engaged to George Gordon, and to-day he has made her an offer of marriage, threatening to throw up everything and leave England at once if she refuses."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mr. Pelham, regarding me in astonishment not unmingled with perplexity. The poor man must have been quite at a loss to understand the connection between my present elated

condition and the revelation of poor Judith's distress.

"Has Miss Bell consented to marry Mr. Kavanagh?"

"No; she is to give him a decisive answer next Sunday."

"Next Sunday—hum!" He held his head on one side, and looked down on the ground exactly like a bird at an empty husk; and then, perking up, he asked, with a little hesitation, "Have you anything else to add?"

"No; that is all I have to tell you."

He regarded the husk again; seriously this time, and, twiddling his thumbs, observed—

"Well, really, I do not see any great cause for exultation over this affair; for if Miss Bell consents, your friend, Mr. Gordon, may lose his sweetheart, and if she refuses he may as certainly lose a considerable part of his fortune."

"I was not thinking of that," I confessed, sobered at once by this plain statement of the

position. "But George Gordon will be back before they can be married."

"That depends on a variety of circumstances over which we have no control. In the first place, we must not count too surely upon Mr. Gordon's escape. We have to trust in the honesty of Mr. Lazarus, the good faith of Peter Schemyl, the dishonesty of a long line of officials, and at any point we may be deceived. Then again, three weeks is a long time, and a clever rascal may do much before that time expires. If Miss Bell consents, he will naturally hurry on the marriage. With a special licence they might be married in a few days. If Miss Bell was engaged to Mr. Gordon only three or four months back she would probably wish to avoid publicity, and be glad to get it over as quickly as possible. The moment they are married it is pretty certain that Kavanagh will accept the terms offered by the Potteries Company and decamp, taking Miss Bell with him, and leaving her father to make the best terms

he can with the company. That, I think, is fairly presumable, when we bear in mind the nature of this unmitigated scoundrel and the extreme danger in which he stands. On the other hand, if Miss Bell refuses to be his wife we may be equally confident that he will immediately put his threat into practice—sell up everything and fly—the one inducement to expose himself to the risk of discovery and punishment being gone. Do you follow me?"

"Yes; you have made it more clear to me than it was. I did not think that they might be married so quickly. Oh, if George Gordon comes home too late! It is terrible to think of that."

"We must prevent anything of that kind happening if we can."

"Tell me what we can do," I said eagerly.

At that moment Miss Janet Pelham, having changed her silk, came down in her stuff, and appeared at the door.

"A little five minutes?" her brother suggested with the cheerful manner and chirrupy tone of a canary asking for sugar.

Miss Janet withdrew with discreet celerity.

"Do you think it probable that Miss Bell will accept Kavanagh?" asked the solicitor.

"She has known him a long while, and they have always been friends. George Gordon has been made to appear false and wicked. She does not love anyone else, and she looks upon Kavanagh as a good and most generous man; and he is handsome to look at."

"Then the probability is she will accept him. *Now* I understand your delight in making this discovery. Believing that the marriage would be delayed for the ordinary length even of a short engagement, you perceived that Kavanagh would be detained in London until the time when Mr. Gordon may, and as we hope will, arrive to confront him."

"No; I did not think of that. It was a selfish consideration that made me happy."

"Well, be that as it may, my dear young lady, such a consummation is possible, and encourages us to regard the affair in a hopeful spirit. Now, do you think you can find means of learning what answer Miss Bell gives?"

"Yes; I believe I can learn that."

"How soon after the event do you suppose?"

"The day after, perhaps—on the Monday."

"That would do. Where will you acquire this information?"

"In Surrey."

"You could telegraph at once to me—the single word, 'Yes' or 'No.'"

"To you, at your office?"

"Precisely. If Miss Bell refuses, we must take proper measures to prevent the Potteries Company making any payment to Kavanagh; if she consents, we must find means of warning Miss Bell to delay the marriage. The course to be taken in either case necessitates the utmost

possible precaution; but we have all the week before us for consideration and reflection, and so I think we may safely dismiss the subject for the present and let the maid bring up the supper."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

JUDITH LEARNS THE TRUTH.

On the following Sunday I went again to Woking, rather because inactivity at West Hackney was unendurable than from expectation of learning Judith's decision that day. It was not likely that she would go up into the wood to give her answer to the offer made there the week before, or that accident would again favour me as it had then. In this I was not undeceived. A drizzling rain fell all the afternoon, and from the opening in the wood where I sat shivering hour after hour I saw no one in the grounds below.

I stayed the night at the "Wheatsheaf," and from my little room in the front of the house I

watched the road the next morning until shortly after nine, when the carriage passed on its way to the station with Kavanagh and Colonel Bell. Kavanagh had a cigar in his lips and a magazine in his hand, indifferent to his companion, who sat with his thin hands folded on the pommel of his stick, and a careworn, wistful look on his poor old face.

I started off at once for the Grange. Neither Taras nor Judith was in the garden when I looked down from the wood; but when I reached the entrance gates and peered through, I perceived Judith in the long walk strolling listlessly towards me, her hands at her back and her eyes on the ground, as if in meditation.

I had made up my mind as to what I should do finding her alone; and so, hastily whipping off my veil and false hair, I pushed open the gate and entered.

At the sound of my step she raised her head, but she continued to advance at the same pace; for she had seen me but once before, and then

very differently dressed, and so did not at once recognise who I was.

Suddenly, however, as we drew nearer to each other, she stopped, and, drawing herself up proudly, regarded me with such scorn and loathing in her white face as I have never seen in another.

I paused also, smitten with pity for her, my heart aching in sympathy for the humiliation and sorrows she had suffered. Then I hurried on to make sure that we were quite alone before I spoke. As I passed her she drew her skirt aside, as if she feared pollution by the mere contact of our dress, and all the time she kept her eyes fixed upon me, terrible with hatred and contempt.

I went as far as the top of the walk, and, seeing neither Taras nor Mère Lucas, I returned to where Judith still stood as if, reversing the fable of Galatea, Hate had transformed her to marble.

"I must speak to you," I said in a low voice

as I approached her. "Where are Taras and Mère Lucas?"

"They are in the house," she answered hoarsely. "*I* will hear nothing that you have to say. If you are in need I will not help you; if you were dying, I would not move a step to save you. You have crushed out all the goodness from my heart; you have made me what I am."

The tone of self-abandonment and misery in which these last three words were uttered belied her asserted heartlessness.

"The goodness is not crushed from your heart, thank Heaven," said I. "Love is stronger than hate. I know, for I have suffered too."

"I will not listen to you," she said vehemently, turning to leave me.

"Wait!" I stepped before her, barring the way. "You must listen to me"; and seeing she was determined to pass by me, I added "I have a message to give you from George Gordon."

She hesitated for an instant; then, with a gesture of refusal, she said indignantly—

"He is nothing to me. It is an insult to speak to me of him. Let me pass."

"He is all the world to you, and you are all the world to him. See," I said, offering the little packet poor George had given me on the eve of my departure; "he has sent you this from Siberia."

She would not take it from my hand; but, looking at me as if she would pierce my very soul to read the truth, she repeated my words, "From Siberia!" in a low tone of incredulity.

I tore open the paper and revealed his signet ring, upon which he had tied an end of pale blue ribbon—some treasured trifle from her dress, which had its pretty story, doubtless.

"From Siberia!" she repeated, but with an accent of tender alarm, the colour rising to her pale cheek as she recognised the objects that lay in my hand.

"The carriage is coming back," I said, catch-

ing the sound of wheels. "I must not be seen here. Take me where I can tell you all unseen and unheard."

"If your intentions are honest, what need is there of secrecy?"

"The need of cheating one who is not honest. What have you to fear from me? Is it likely that I should come to insult you or do you an injury? Come this way," I added eagerly, stepping towards an alley that turned from the drive as the sound of the returning carriage suddenly became more distinct.

She hesitated to comply.

"What if I refuse?" she said half aloud, as if putting the question to herself.

"Then God forgive you; for the ruin of the man who loves you may be your doing."

She followed me down the alley as the carriage came in sight. A dozen paces brought me to an arbour cut in the thick yew hedge. I stepped quickly into the recess, and Judith followed me. I rested myself on one of the rustic stools, but

Judith stood before the little table that separated us. When the carriage had passed the end of the walk I laid the ring on the table before her, saying—

"Let it lie there till your heart bids you take it. It should not lie there long. Is it not a proof of his constant love and fidelity that he sends this token and that I bring it?"

"You brought it from Siberia?"

"I brought it from Siberia. He was taken by treachery—my treachery. Oh, I am not guiltless. I deserve all the reproaches that you can heap upon me. I aided his enemy, knowing that I was blighting your happiness; but I myself was taken in the trap I had laid for him. We were carried off to St. Petersburg and sent away into Siberia. An accident enabled us to escape from a prison on the road. We reached the forest, George Gordon and I. There was no path in the endless forest—no track in the field of snow to guide us. We had no food; we were lost. I must have perished but for him. He

never left me, though by himself he might have reached some village. Day after day we crept along, he helping me, never failing to find a kind and cheering word, though his strength gave out so that his hand was weaker than a child's."

I stopped, for poor Judith's spirit at this point suddenly broke down. Sinking with a faint cry upon the stool beside her, she snatched up her lover's ring, and, laying her arms on the table, buried her face in her hands, and burst into tears of joy and grief.

Presently, looking up—her face wet, her eyes blinded with tears—she asked fiercely—

"Did he know that it was through you he had come to that?"

"Yes."

"And still he forgave you?"

"Yes."

"I cannot," she exclaimed passionately; "I shall never forgive you"; then, brushing her tears away, she gazed at his ring for a moment,

and covering her face again, moaned fondly, "*My* George!—*my* George!"

As her emotion subsided, she raised her head and said imperiously—

"Tell me more—finish this history of your crime."

"We found a friend, and the means by which one of us three could escape. George Gordon decided that I should go."

"And you consented to come away and leave him there?" she asked, her brows bent in contempt and anger.

"Would you have had him come and leave me there?" I asked.

"No, no, no—my George could not do so. I forgive you that."

"At the last moment he gave me that ring. 'Tell my sweetheart,' he said, 'that I am coming.'"

"He is coming!" she gasped, looking wildly around her, as if expecting to see him. "Where is he now? Oh, my God!" she exclaimed,

starting to her feet in consternation; then, turning upon me in fury, she said, "This you have to answer for—I have given my hand to another."

I was glad to hear this, knowing who that other was. She must have seen the signs of satisfaction in my face, for she added passionately—

"Have you no heart? Does this fail to sting your conscience with remorse?"

"I expected it. I was at the opening in the wood when Kavanagh made you the offer. I came here expressly to find out if you had accepted him."

"And you rejoice to think that the man who gave you freedom shall return to find me married! What devilish malice possesses you?"

"You have said many bitter things to me without reflection, condemning me unheard. Am I not to have my revenge?"

"Enjoy it while you may. Your vengeance will be short. Mr. Kavanagh will release me when he knows the truth."

"He must not know the truth. You must not breathe a word that would lead him to waver in his determination to make you his wife."

She regarded me in silent perplexity, probably divining, as she regained her power to reason, that I was merely playing with words; and, indeed, she must have seen by the expression of my face, and the tell-tale tears that had risen to my eyes, that I had no malice in my heart.

"When have you promised to marry?" I asked.

"Soon; in a week or a fortnight," she answered readily, with the growing assurance that my question was not due to an idle or vindictive purpose.

"That is too soon. You must be ill and postpone it a little while. You must not marry before George Gordon returns; and he may not be here for three weeks."

"I do not understand you," she faltered.

"I—I think my passion has made me unjust; you cannot be in earnest. Why am I not to tell Mr. Kavanagh?"

"Because if you do," I replied with unmistakable earnestness—"if you suffer him even to guess that you have seen me or heard one word about your lover, George Gordon will never return."

Mute with fear and astonishment, she seated herself again, entreating me by the mere expression of her face to tell her more.

"You want to know why. I will tell you. It is because Kavanagh is a villain—the most cunning, the most wicked villain that ever lived. He told you that he had never loved any woman but you. He has married one, at any rate, and he will be made to answer for her life. He is an agent of the Russian Police. He betrayed his wife's brother for money, and sent him into exile. He has tried again and again to make his friend Taras prisoner and put him away; and, failing that—" I stopped, shuddering.

"It was he who blinded Taras!" Judith exclaimed in horror.

"He, or the man he paid to do the work for him. He sent George Gordon away, forged his name to get the money he left behind him, and ruined your father that he might obtain you. He is prepared to sell all his possessions at any hour and leave the country, knowing the danger he runs in staying here where, at any moment, his villainy may be discovered. He only wants to get possession of you to complete the list of his crimes."

"This is terrible. It is difficult to realise that the man I have trusted as the best friend—"

"If he could not deceive a woman he would not be an agent of the Russian Police. You *must* believe it. I cannot leave you until you are so convinced of his treachery and power that nothing can lead you to disclose what I have revealed. At a word from him fresh vigilance will be employed on the frontier; Gordon may

be detected, and sent away to some place where men's lives end in madness or in suicide."

"You should not have told me this," Judith said with recoiling terror.

"It was necessary. The solicitor who advises me pointed out that Kavanagh would press you to an early marriage. The risk was too great to run, and I relied upon love giving you strength and courage to outwit Kavanagh. You have revenge as well as love to aid you. Think of your lover's peril; of your father's suffering—"

"Tell me again," she said fiercely. "Let me know more."

I told her at greater length what I knew of Kavanagh, and then recounted many incidents to prove Gordon's devotion to her—his generosity and kindness to me. In the end she took my hand and pressed it warmly—seeing that I had true sympathy with her—and begged me to forgive her for the many bitter things she had said, and the still more bitter thoughts she had left unexpressed.

"You may trust me now, dear," she said, more firmly in conclusion; "I will be a match for Kavanagh in duplicity if there be need."

Then giving her an address where she could write to me if occasion arose, I left her.

She wrote at the end of the week, telling me that she had pleaded illness as an excuse for not seeing Kavanagh the following Sunday. "And indeed, dear," she added, "I am greatly shaken by anxiety and this terrible suspense. Oh, that the next fortnight were past!"

But we had less than a fortnight to wait. In the middle of the second week after our interview at the Grange I received a telegram. My heart stood still when, on opening it, I found that it came from Berlin. The message was short and purposely guarded.

"Safe. Dover pier, Friday morning.—Ivan Dontremember."

CHAPTER XLIX.

GORDON'S RETURN.

My first impulse on reading the telegram was to telegraph the joyous news to Judith, but Mr. Pelham—to whom I had communicated little by little, as my confidence in him increased, all the principal facts of the case—overruled my desire.

"Probably, as you suggest," said he, "Mr. Gordon's name has been omitted for prudential reasons, but there is nothing in it to prove that he is in Berlin; and it would be unwise, not to say cruel, to convey that belief to Miss Bell until we have positive assurance that he is beyond the reach of the Russian police. She does not expect him so soon, and it seems to

me worth the delay of a couple of days to avoid even the possibility of giving bitter disappointment."

The bare supposition that Gordon might not arrive with Ivan Dontremember inspired me with such poignant regret that I readily yielded to my solicitor's direction, so that Judith was at least spared the sombre fears that clouded my bright hopes.

Mr. Pelham and I went together to Dover, and on Friday morning, hours before the boat was due, I stationed myself on the end of the pier, straining my eyes over the grey waters. At length a seaman, who knew what I was looking for, pointed out a speck in the distance, and told me it was the Calais boat. Nearer and nearer it came, and almost as soon as I could distinguish one passenger from another on the deck I saw a handkerchief fluttering on the bridge, and I made out the stalwart figure of George Gordon. He wore a light-coloured Inverness that added to his bulk. Presently I

discovered the inseparable pipe in his mouth; then I was sure that it was he.

"That's he — George Gordon," I cried, pointing him out to Mr. Pelham.

"And Mr. Dontremember; do you see him?"

I had forgotten him in my delirious excitement, but now I perceived his elfish figure in a tightly buttoned coat; his appearance made more grotesque by a large fur cap with the lappet turned down and tied under his chin. Then looking at George Gordon again and seeing the grin of delight that spread over his face—a fine brick red from exposure to the wind—I felt that I must burst into tears or laughter, or go to some such foolish excess. Even Mr. Pelham smiled in complaisance with me. The only one whose face expressed no joy was Ivan Dontremember's. The voyage had made his complexion livid, and his eyes had the pathetically stolid look of the ape, as if he were at a loss to know what there was in the world for men and women to laugh at.

Then came the meeting; George Gordon taking me by both hands and kissing me on each cheek in the exuberance of his happiness.

"Judith—is she all right?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," I replied.

"And old Taras?"

"He is with Judith."

His countenance fell as he noticed the change in my expression and the hesitation with which I replied. Ivan Dontremember craned forward to hear my reply, when Gordon asked—

"What's the matter?"

I could not reply. The words choked me. I shook my head, covering my eyes with my hand.

"He has lost his sight," Mr. Pelham said, coming to my rescue; "they have blinded him."

"I told you how it would end," observed Ivan Dontremember calmly; "exile, mutilation, or death."

George Gordon passed his arms through mine and, leading me away, said gently—

"Bear up, little woman. We have got him still with us, and now they have done their worst they will leave him in peace. A fine fellow like Taras is not dependent for happiness on the realisation of one idea. He has fought a good fight, and can afford to lay down his arms and enjoy the pleasures of a peaceful life; and we'll find 'em for him, don't you know."

We went into the hotel to get breakfast, and there for the first time I bethought myself of introducing the little solicitor, who had been trying to make himself agreeable to Ivan Dontremember, but with very little effect.

"This is Mr. Pelham," I said—"a solicitor who has helped me a great deal; indeed, I think you would not have been here now if he had not advised me how to act."

"Doubly glad to know you, Mr. Pelham," said Gordon, grasping his hand and shaking it

cordially. "We shall draw still further on your kindness, for there's a lot to be thought of. But not a word of business till we've had breakfast. Waiter, bring me a quart of bitter beer to begin with."

While we were eating he gave me a description of their flight from Siberia.

"Borgis Schemyl is a brick," he declared; "as honest a man, for a tax collector, as you would wish to meet. What he doesn't know in the way of bribery and corruption isn't worth knowing. As soon as he received the tip from brother Peter at Moscow, he just tucked up his sleeves and set to work like a weasel in a rabbit hutch. As luck would have it, you know those two blackguard Cossacks who kept us company from St. Petersburg had been despatched to hunt us down, and were spending a day or two at the post in getting drunk, so what did our little Borgis do one night when he had tucked 'em up comfortably on top of the stove, but he takes away every rag of clothing that

belonged to them—their accoutrements, papers, everything, and brings them to us. I squeeze myself into one uniform; Dontremember pads himself out in the other. We were lovely to look at! Dontremember didn't need any further adornment, but it was thought advisable to swathe up the lower part of my face in a great bloodstained handkerchief. This gave colour to the theory that my jaw had been fractured in a desperate encounter with brodyags, and obviated the necessity of answering questions on the road, except by mumbled sounds, which Dontremember alone could interpret. When these arrangements were made, we went into the post-house, where Borgis bound his sister-in-law hand and foot, and laid her out on the floor with a gag in her mouth, and at his request we served him in the same manner. This was done for the satisfaction of the drunken Cossacks, who, when they awoke from their slumbers, were to conclude that we had broken into the house while they were under the pernicious influence

of drink, overpowered the postmaster, and stolen their belongings, do you see? Borgis bade us farewell with a wink as he lay on the ground, adding a nod and a grunt to signify that he would like us to shut the door after us to keep out the cold, and off we went. The Cossacks' horses were in the stable, saddled and ready; we had only to jump in the saddle and canter away in the starlight. Dontremember knew the road, and we pushed along as if we were after a fugitive and thirsting for vengeance on the rascal who had broken my jaw. At every post we changed horses, but we didn't sleep there—oh, no! we were much too eager to overtake our fugitives for that. But we made up for it by requisitioning food and shelter at isolated farm-houses and places where there was no likelihood of being troubled by inquisitive officials. We had lots of adventures—pretty risky ones too—but we pulled through all right, and ultimately arrived one fine night at the outskirts of Moscow, where Dontremember has friends.

There we were transformed into an American merchant and his courier, who very kindly lent us their passports, and without any further difficulty passed through St. Petersburg, and reached Berlin."

When Gordon began his narrative, Ivan Dontremember pulled a book from his pocket and began to read, as though these past adventures had no longer any interest for him; and during the conversation that ensued he still read on. One might have thought him deaf and dumb from his silence and perfect indifference to what was going on. The book absorbed his attention until Gordon, having finished his long meal, said, "Now let us talk about what we are going to do next." Then he quietly marked the place, and, having slipped the book in his pocket, tilted his chair back, clasped his hands at the back of his head, and fixed his eyes listlessly on a stain in the ceiling.

"Yes, let us decide that soon," I said; "I want to telegraph to Judith."

"Where is she?" asked Gordon.

"She is with Taras in Surrey."

"Well, we had better go there at once."

I cast an inquiring look at Mr. Pelham.

"There is a great deal to discuss, and there may be some legal formalities to transact this morning," said he. "But I think you might go there this afternoon, to-day being only Friday."

Gordon looked perplexed. Ivan Dont-remember, still slowly swaying to and fro in his chair, kept his eyes on the ceiling.

"You will explain what has happened," said I to Mr. Pelham, "while I go to the post office."

He acquiesced, and I left the room. It was a private room. At the post office I wrote with feverish eagerness my message to Judith:—

"He is here. We are coming to you this afternoon. Tell Taras everything."

When I returned to the hotel Mr. Pelham, with raised eyebrows, was gravely twirling his thumbs on his crossed knees; Gordon was pacing the room with violent anger marked on his face,

and in striking contrast to him Ivan Dont-remember sat with one elbow on the table and his chin in the palm of his hand, idly scraping the crumbs on the cloth into a long line with the bread knife.

"What are you to do with a confounded villain like that?" exclaimed Gordon wrathfully, referring evidently to Kavanagh.

"Well," replied Mr. Pelham, with judicial slowness, "there are two or three indictable offences. We can take immediate proceedings for his arrest on the charge of forgery. The forcible abduction is another very serious——"

"I am not thinking of that," interrupted Gordon impatiently. "What punishment is good enough for the wretch who blinded Taras."

"That, of course, depends upon the evidence."

"Evidence!" exclaimed Gordon, scornfully. "Must you see an adder strike before you hit him on the head? We know he blinded Taras."

"The presumptive evidence is strong, but I doubt if it is sufficient to obtain a conviction."

"Of course it isn't; and if it were, what then? A year or two in prison: is that sufficient for blasting the life of such a man as Taras? You may muzzle a vicious dog, but this is something more than a vicious dog—he is a tiger."

"And tigers you exterminate," observed Ivan Dontremember quietly.

"Still, gentlemen, *seven* years' penal servitude for the forgery," suggested Mr. Pelham with persuasive suavity. "*Seven* years I may safely venture to predict."

"A good thrashing suits my views better."

"My dear sir!" expostulated the solicitor, shocked by the lawless views of his new client.

"It will come to that. I don't see anything else that a man can do. I'll thrash him within an inch of his life."

"Leave him an inch. I shall want that," said Dontremember, still scraping crumbs together.

"Really, gentlemen," Mr. Pelham interposed,

in plaintive remonstrance, "as a legal adviser, I cannot countenance your taking the law into your own hands. It is quite illegal and altogether inadvisable from every point of view. Why, he might bring a cross action for assault."

"Hang it! I only wish he may make some opposition. Thrashing a limp rascal takes the nerve out of your arm."

"Your blood will warm when you begin," remarked Ivan Dontremember.

"Oh, dear, dear!" exclaimed Mr. Pelham, raising his hands and shaking his head mournfully. Then brightening up a little, he added, coaxingly, "Now, suppose we could get him *fourteen* years?"

"Get him as much as you can," said Gordon doggedly, "but he shall have his thrashing to begin with."

"My dear sir, you quite lose sight of the purpose of punishment, which should never be administered in a passionate, a vindictive, or a revengeful spirit. Our laws are mercifully framed,

not to avenge past misdeeds, but to prevent their recurrence. Now, any breach of the peace is calculated to lead to further crime."

"Make yourself easy on that score," said Dontremember. "He will sin no more!"

"I beg you to consider what will happen, my dear sir," said Pelham, making a last appeal to Gordon. "To-morrow, in all probability, Mr. Kavanagh will go to Betterford Grange to pay his customary visit."

"That will be time enough. Give him till to-morrow."

"Then, if you still adhere to your present purpose, you will thrash him?"

"I will," said Gordon emphatically.

Mr. Pelham gulped, as if swallowing a very bitter pill, before he continued—

"This proceeding will take place probably to-morrow evening. To-morrow is Saturday, remember. Now, having regard to the circumstances of the case, what do you think he will do on Sunday?"

"Stay in bed, I should say."

"No, he will not, sir," said Mr. Pelham, his meekness giving place to something like asperity. "He will make shift to get to the office at the Lambeth Pottery, knowing that no one will be there on Sunday, and that we cannot take legal action against him before Monday. You may be sure that he keeps all his available property in the safe there. I am convinced of this, for I passed the place one night and perceived that a grating had been let in the shutter, and a gas light was directly in front of the safe, that it might be under the eye of the policeman on the beat. Over five thousand pounds of that property belong to you. He will take it and leave the country before Monday morning. Knowing the character of the man, you cannot say that the thing is impossible."

"No; but that's another argument on my side. He may get off with my money, but hang me if he shall get off without that hiding."

"But the hiding, sir, is the very thing that leads to the loss of your property."

"It looks as if I should lose that anyhow," said Gordon.

"But you won't," said Ivan Dontremember in the impassive tone of conviction.

CHAPTER L.

THE MEETING OF FRIENDS AND FOES.

George Gordon went out to buy himself an English pipe and some English tobacco—exile had given him a rage for everything English—and the little solicitor, with indomitable perseverance in the cause of law and order, accompanied him with a wheedling murmur of "depositions" and "warrants." As soon as they were gone, Ivan Dontremember drew a notebook from his pocket, and opening it pointed to a rough diagram, and said—

"There is where you used to live; can you tell me who inhabits the house now?"

Looking closer at the drawing and the lettered parts described below in Gordon's bold hand-

writing, I saw that it represented a ground plan of the pottery, the yard at the back, Taras's workshop, and our former dwelling-house.

"Nobody lives there now," I replied; "the house is empty."

He gave a nod of satisfaction, closed the notebook, put it back in his pocket, and then, with more geniality than he had yet shown, opened a conversation about my escape from Siberia, which lasted until Gordon and Mr. Pelham returned.

Gordon carried a stout stick he had purchased; Mr. Pelham looked as if the end of the world was within measurable distance.

We went together to London, and after lunching there, Gordon and I took a cab to Waterloo, leaving Mr. Pelham and Ivan Dontremember behind us. It was a surprise to us when at the last moment Dontremember held out his hand and said—

"Good-bye, George Gordon!"

"Why, you are coming with us, old fellow,"

exclaimed Gordon. "You must come to see Taras."

"No, not now. A death's head is not wanted at your feast. Perhaps I shall come to you on Monday — perhaps not," he added, dropping Gordon's hand and turning away with a last nod to me.

We looked after him in silent speculation; but little thinking that we were to see our friend no more.

At Woking station we found a fly that carried us to Betterford. Taras was standing at the gate with Judith by his side. As Gordon stood up in the carriage waving his hat, she ran to meet us, leaving Taras. Gordon leapt out of the fly before it stopped, and the next moment she was wrapped in his big arms, standing on tiptoe to reach his lips.

Taras took my hands in silence—we were both greatly moved—but as he led me through the open gate he murmured—

"Brave, dear friend—my unchanged, un-

changing Aura! You have come back not to go away again."

"Never, never," I answered fervently. "Oh, if I may stay with you till the end of my life! That is the wish of my heart; and I have no secrets from you now."

"Ah, you have guarded your secret well, and I was a poor seer not to guess the truth. I could only tell that there was something hidden, that none of us had the true clue to the mystery. But in one thing I was not at fault. I said that you would come back to me, and even you could not shake my faith in that. When Judith told me she must leave me, they would have had me advertise for a companion—a stranger to fill your place, think of it! They thought me mad when I told them you would come back in time. But you have come, dear, brave, self-sacrificing friend. The luck has turned."

"I should think it had," cried Gordon, overtaking us, "and not a bit to soon."

Then the two friends grasped hands like a

couple of giants, and stood smiling in each other's faces, Gordon with a tremulous movement of the lips as he looked at the closed eyes which used to shine upon him and could shine no more.

"Something like a jolly meeting, this," he said stoutly, as he mastered his emotion; "worth going to Siberia to feel like this when one comes back; but, hang me if I go again!"

"You have no friend to save—that's why," said Taras. "The Czar is satisfied. They'll leave me alone now."

"Ay, old chap, but we march out with flying colours, and can hang up our swords with pride."

That was the only reference made to the past.

"By Jupiter, what a jolly old place!" Gordon exclaimed as we came in sight of the house; "but what's the meaning of all those shuttered windows?"

"That is the part we have not yet found use

for. Eight or nine rooms are about as many as Mère Lucas can comfortably manage."

"The best part of the house is unoccupied," added Judith.

"The best part do you say? That sounds as if it might be good enough for us. What do you think, partner mine, shall we build our nest here?"

"Like the swallows, without asking whether we are welcome or not," suggested Judith.

"Yes," said Taras, "and like them, bringing happiness to the house."

Judith and I went upstairs together. We had a great deal to tell each other. Looking from the window we saw Taras and Gordon on the lawn. Oh, it was good to see them filling their pipes from the same pouch, strolling across the smooth grass with their arms linked, puffing out clouds of blue smoke, and still better to hear them joining in a hearty laugh.

"It is the first time I have heard him

laugh," said Judith. "His patience has sometimes pained me; his endeavour to find a cheerful outlook in the future only proved how persistently memories of the past haunted him, how tedious the present moment was. Now, you have changed all that."

"I!"

"Yes; you were more to him than sight. The loss of you was the real grief, not the loss of his eyes. That he looked upon almost as a foreseen calamity—'the chance of war,' as he says. He has always maintained that you would come back. The next room is yours; it was furnished expressly for you, and all that belonged to you in Lambeth is in there. 'Nothing yet from my little friend?' he has asked sometimes after I have read his letters to him. You have always been present here to him. I felt that. It hurt me frequently to feel that I could never be so much to him as you were. I am sure that my presence irritated him sometimes, and that he was glad to be left alone. In those moments he

was thinking of you; something in my manner compared unfavourably with his recollection of you. I can afford to tell you all this now, dear. At one time it wounded my pride to suspect it, and I would not have confessed the fact to myself. But it gives me joy to tell you all now."

She left me as Mère Lucas tapped at the door and humbly begged to speak to her dear mademoiselle. I wished I could escape also. I thought the poor old woman would never be comforted, or cease to beat her ample breast, and call herself hard names.

"To think of the indignities, the affronts, the insults I offered you, my dear, my most respected mademoiselle! What a brute I was, what an animal, what an imbecile! To offer you a place as domestic servant in this house; to take you into my own room when I ought to have led you into the best drawing-room; to permit myself to eat at the same table with you; and to offer you the little wine and

the remains of food that are only good enough for a fool and a dolt such as I am—though certainly they are better than I deserve. And to think that you had behaved unworthily at the very time when you were risking your life to save my dear master; and, what is more, to believe ill of that dear Monsieur Gordon, who could not do wrong to save his life, God bless him!—as droll as ever and as kind. But I am richly punished for it, look you, for I broke three things since lunch and let my milk boil over for the first time in my life. Ah, mon Dieu! that it should come to this at my age!"

Happily the fear of some further culinary disaster put an end to her sobs and self-reproaches; but for a long while after I never passed her without hearing her address herself as a camel, a pig, or some other object of contempt.

George Gordon, going to the window after dinner, exclaimed—

"A glorious night, by Jove! How would it be if we went out for half an hour?"

"Very agreeable, I should say," replied Taras.

The idea was equally acceptable to Judith and me, and when we had put on our wraps we joined Gordon and Taras in the garden. Chatting and laughing we strolled down the broad walk in a row, but passing through the gate, Taras and Judith took the lead, and in that order we sauntered along the Woking road. Judith, I believe, intending to take the by-path to her favourite seat in the wood.

At the angle of the road Gordon stopped to relight his pipe.

"This is the old box," said he, scratching a vesta. "Do you remember that day when we found there were only two matches left?"

I made no reply, for looking down the road I saw Taras and Judith, who were a dozen yards or so in advance, suddenly stop.

"Bother the wind!" exclaimed Gordon, throwing away the dead vesta and taking out another.

But he paused in the act of striking it, for we both heard a well-known voice saying—

"Taras — Judith! Why this is a surprise for me, and I suppose my coming is for you? I thought I might steal a few hours to satisfy my anxiety."

It was Kavanagh. His voice had dropped from a tone of cheerful astonishment to uneasy perplexity, and he added—

"Has anything happened?"

"Come on," muttered Gordon, catching my hand in his; "we'll show the villain what has happened." And he shook that fine new stick of his.

I heard Taras speaking in a terrible tone as we hurried on, but I could not catch his words. Then we came up and stood before Kavanagh, near enough for him to distinguish our faces in the pale starlight.

"I understand now," he said, with forced composure. "You have come back."

"Yes; come back to call you to account,"

thundered Gordon. "What have you to say for yourself, you confounded villain?"

"Nothing, if you take that tone," Kavanagh replied, tapping the palm of his left hand lightly with the cane he held in his right. "When you can listen to reason I shall be able to justify every act that may seem inscrutable to you now."

"You'll have plenty of scope for your ingenuity in that way when you are in the dock. The lawyers will fight you there; here you have to settle matters with me."

There was no mistaking what he meant when he threw off his Inverness.

"Take this warning," said Kavanagh, closing his left hand tightly on his cane and stepping back a pace. "If you attempt to offer violence the result may be fatal—to you. I am not unprepared to protect myself."

As he spoke he gave the head of his cane a twist, whipped out the rapier to which it was a handle, and throwing aside the stick, placed himself in an attitude of defence.

With a cry of terror, Judith attempted to throw herself between Gordon and Kavanagh, but Taras, who had caught the sound of the steel, forcibly restrained her.

For my own part, I could neither move nor utter a sound. The long thin sword was scarcely visible in the dim light. I had heard that Kavanagh was an expert swordsman. What chance had Gordon, armed only with a stick, against the deadly, almost unseen weapon of his adversary?

CHAPTER LI.

THE END OF KAVANAGH.

Without a moment's hesitation Gordon threw himself upon his antagonist, striking at his sword arm. The blow fell, and was followed by a howl of pain from Kavanagh. I thought Gordon had escaped injury by some happy accident, but the next moment, as he stepped back, I saw the rapier hanging down from his side under the left arm. Shifting his stick for an instant, he drew the bent weapon out and flung it aside. In that brief space Kavanagh turned and took to his heels, but Gordon pursued and overtook him before he had gone a dozen yards, and a struggle ensued, Kavanagh grappling close to give Gordon's stick less play. But he

was no match for Gordon at wrestling, and presently he went over Gordon's shoulder, falling in the road with a thud. He would have been content to lie there, but Gordon dragged him on to his feet, and running him along at arm's length, thrashed him without mercy, until the miserable wretch threw himself down again in the road and shammed unconsciousness.

Gordon declared he was unhurt, spoke scornfully of Kavanagh's rapier, and wondered how an old hand could rely on a twopenny-halfpenny sword-stick for defence. But when we returned to the house he helped himself to a liberal dose of whisky, and said he thought he would "just go upstairs and put himself straight a bit." He was in his room some time, and came down in another suit of clothes.

"I've helped myself to a suit of yours," I heard him say to Taras. "That beastly spit pricked me under the arm and made my coat in a bit of a mess. I couldn't make out how it was I felt wet all down that side."

"We can't afford to let you trifle with yourself," said Taras; "if the wound is serious—"

"Wound! hang it, it's only a scratch, man! I've stuck a lump of wadding out of your dress coat on the place—the muscle under the arm, don't you know—and I shall be as right as rain after supper."

About the same time the gardener, who had been sent to look after Kavanagh, returned and informed us, in his roundabout manner, that the "gent" was getting on pretty nicely—seemed a little upset, like—kind of knocked up, in a manner of speaking; but he had found his hat, and could manage to limp along pretty lively if we understood what he meant.

What happened to Kavanagh after this was witnessed by William Wright, one of the kiln hands at the pottery at Lambeth.

At five o'clock on that Friday, the office was closed as usual. Old Mr. Bell was the last to leave. Before going he went through the works and stopped to chat with William Wright, who

was coaling up the brown-ware kiln; talked about the quantity of fuel used; and asked Wright whether he didn't think a cheaper coal would answer the same purpose as that they were burning, and so on. Always on the look out for means of economising, Mr. Bell. Nevertheless, he gave Wright twopence for a pint of ale when he bade him "Good-night" in his friendly way. Wonderfully nice old gentleman. At six o'clock the bell rang, and all the hands went away from the pottery except Wright, whose turn it was to keep the fires up till Stevens came at two to relieve him.

About seven, Wright, having coaled up, went to the side door in Ferry Street to get a breath of fresh air. While he was standing there smoking half a pipe, an odd-looking little fellow came up to him and passed the time of day. He had a queer, monkeyish sort of face, with a short, bristly red beard, and he wore a fur cap.

"Is Mr. Kavanagh in the works?" he asked.

"No," answered Wright. "He went away this afternoon, and won't be back till Monday."

"Can you tell me where I might find him?"

"You'll have to go to Betterford—that's beyond Woking—to find him."

"Woking; that's a long way. Are you sure he is there?"

"Certain, 'cause I had to post the letters to him there as came in by the last post."

"This is very awkward. I'm a potter, and I counted on getting a bit of work."

"You're a Russian, ain't you?"

"Yes; how do you know?"

"Because you talk like the parties who come to ask after Mr. Taras."

"You work late here?" said the little man after a pause.

"We knock off at six; I'm here to fire up. Friday's salting day with us."

He had to explain the process of salt glazing before the foreigner understood this.

"We don't glaze like that in our country.

I expect your kilns are quite unlike ours. Have you any objection to my looking at them?"

"Well," said Wright, after a little hesitation, "it's against the rules to let strangers in, but as you're going to be a hand in the works, I don't mind."

Wright took him round the kiln, and showed him the fire-holes, the foreigner looking about and taking notice of everything with his round, deep-sunk eyes. Then he led him up to the throwing floor, where the foreigner was interested in the potters' wheels and the boards of clay jars set round the body of the kiln to dry; thence Wright took him up the steps on to the salting floor, which is level with the dome of the kiln. The huge kiln here begins to taper into a funnel passing up through the roof. In one side is an opening about the height of a man, and three or four feet wide, and through this one sees on a level with the floor the dome covering that part of the kiln in which the pottery is exposed to the flames. In the middle of the

dome is an opening, through which the flame rises in a compact body. William Wright took his visitor to the opening in the side of the kiln, and pointed out the holes through which the salt is poured to glaze the earthenware; but, not content with this, the little foreigner went inside, right on the dome of the kiln, and looked down into the inside. Wright says he looked like a demon in a pantomime as he stood almost within singeing distance of the flame, grinning down into the fiery pit below.

"It's better than anything we've got in Russia," he declared when he came out.

"There's nothing more to see; now we'll go down again," said Wright.

But when they reached the throwing-floor nothing would satisfy the foreigner but he must go poking about right as far as the warehouse steps leading down to the office.

"Here, come on, mate, you've seen enough," said Wright, who by this time began to suspect that he had not done well to infringe the rules.

At this remark the foreigner followed Wright to the ground floor; and there again the spirit of inquiry was strong upon him. He would go round to look at the fire-holes again, and Wright following, with sulky slowness, no doubt, lost sight of him on the other side of the coals. Couldn't make out where he'd got to; looked for him high and low, lit a lantern, and went right out into the yard behind Mr. Taras's house. Wasn't anywhere. Finally he concluded that, being a foreigner (and consequently mean) the little man had sneaked out into Ferry Street and gone off in that unceremonious fashion in order to avoid standing a drop of beer for the trouble Wright had taken to explain things nicely to him.

Nothing occurred until just about midnight, when Wright had another surprise as he was breathing the cool air of Ferry Street. Mr. Kavanagh came down Ferry Street from the front office. He was limping; his coat was torn, his hat broken, his hand thrust into the breast of his frock coat. Never saw him look anything

like it before, William Wright hadn't—wouldn't have known him if he hadn't spoken.

"What the deuce is the matter with the front door?" asked Mr. Kavanagh angrily. "I can't open it with my key."

"I expect Mr. Bell double-locked it inside. He did come out through the works, and he's so wonderful particular."

"Cursed old idiot!" growled Kavanagh, passing him. "Bring a light. I must go down through the warehouse."

Wright lit a lantern and lighted the way through the throwing-room, the warehouse, and the passage leading to the shop and office. There Kavanagh tried to open the front door with his key, but found that something fouled the wards of the lock and prevented the key from turning. He swore again at Mr. Bell for a muddling, meddling old fool, and giving up the attempt said to Wright—

"You can go. Leave the lantern there. I will come back by the warehouse."

Wright went back and fired up his kiln, wondering how the governor, always so spick and span, had fallen into that battered condition, and what on earth he had come to the office for at that hour. Whatever did he want there?

He had just banked up the last fire-hole when he thought he heard a voice calling faintly in the distance, "Wright! Wright!" He stood quite still to listen, and heard beyond doubt the cry repeated — "Wright! Wright!" — in a shriek of supplication and terror, and it was the governor's voice.

He answered, and ran upstairs.

As he was crossing the throwing-room Kavanagh rushed out of the darkness from the warehouse, and came to his side panting for breath. He had a stone jar in his hand which he had caught up for defence, and he looked back into the darkness and round him with wild terror, his face white as a sheet of paper.

"Do you see him?" he gasped.

"Who, sir?" asked Wright.

"A man with a red beard and a bald head."

"No, sir."

"Lay hold of that jar. If you see him, brain him. He's a madman."

Wright armed himself with a jar from an instinct of self-defence; but not being a strong man he determined to bolt if he found himself in danger, and got the chance.

"You must have passed him in the warehouse," whispered Kavanagh hoarsely. "I heard a bottle knocked over soon after you went. I thought it was you prying about. When I went up and turned round I found *him* just behind me. He knocked the lantern out of my hand. I don't know where he went. He was behind me one moment—in front of me the next. What's that?" he exclaimed, suddenly dropping the jar and clutching Wright's arm.

Then, gaping with fear, he shrank back, nodding and glaring at the hopper through which Wright had come up.

Wright looked that way too, but saw

nothing. He thought the governor must be "gone off" or seized with "the jumps" or something. It made him feel shaky and queer to see a man usually self-composed so completely unnerved and panic-stricken.

"Go down and look if he's there," whispered Kavanagh, laying his hand on the rail of the upper stairs, ready to fly at a moment's warning. "You shall have ten pounds if you stun him with that jar. If he's not there, run to the door and scream for help. I left a cab round the corner—the man will hear you—but come back here quick."

Reluctantly and with care Wright proceeded to obey these orders. He descended three stairs, and then, crouching down, looked round the stoking-floor, lit only in patches by the light from the fire-holes. Right in the farther corner there were two twinkling points of light; probably it was nothing but a piece of coal reflecting a flickering ray from the kiln, but it looked like a pair of fiendish eyes, and that

was enough for Wright. He ran back to the governor.

"He's down there," said he, only less apprehensive than the shaking wretch he spoke to.

"Where?"

"At the side of the kil'—'twixt the steps and the door."

Without a word Kavanagh crept swiftly up the stairs to the floor above. Wright was about to follow when someone brushed past him and ran up the stairs like a cat. It was the impish foreigner who had gone over the works earlier in the night, only now he wore neither boots nor hat, and his head was bald and shining.

Wright stood there breathless, at a loss to know what to do between duty to his master and duty to himself. He would have been glad to get out into Ferry Street and leave the governor to settle his own affairs as he best could; but the dread of an accomplice of the foreigner starting out from beyond the coal and

knifing him, foreigner-like, withheld him. Presently, gaining confidence by the perfect silence above, he stole up the stairs till his head rose just over the level of the floor and he could see right along the salting-room. In front was the cone of the kiln, with the opening or "archway" directly facing him, filled with a glare of yellow light. On each side was deep, impenetrable shadow, thrown by the walls of the cone. Wright saw neither Kavanagh nor the foreigner; both were somewhere in that deep shade.

Suddenly there rose a scream of terror from the darkness, and Kavanagh rushed out into the light. He was making for the steps when, catching sight of a head before him, and not recognising that it was Wright in that instant, he stopped as if he had run against a wall.

In that moment the foreigner leapt out of the obscurity and sprang upon him.

"Mercy! mercy!" cried Kavanagh. "I can explain about Vera."

But the foreigner made no answer, and there

was only a rattle in the governor's throat as he tried to speak again.

They struggled furiously in the light that streamed through the archway; but Kavanagh could make but a poor resistance, for his right arm was powerless, and his adversary had the agility and muscular vitality of a panther.

Wright did not know what to do—he hadn't time, he says, to think of anything—besides that, he could not tell what the foreigner was after. He only saw that the little man was dragging and shoving the governor nearer and nearer to the archway. Kavanagh must have known, though, for his struggles grew more and more frantic as they approached the opening in the kiln. Wright perceived the purpose of the foreigner when Kavanagh, with a wild scream, made a desperate effort to cling to the side of the archway. Then Wright found strength to run to his assistance, but it was too late. The foreigner had torn Kavanagh away from the wall, and got him right on to the dome, and they

were swaying to and fro in the death struggle within a foot of the hole in the middle of the dome. For a moment they swayed there right over the steady flame; then Kavanagh's foot slipped, and, locked in each other's arms, they both fell and toppled down into the body of the kiln. Then, William Wright says, the yellow flame turned a red brown for a minute or two with the thick smoke that streamed up.

CHAPTER LII.

I BECOME A PRINCESS.

When Mr. Pelham brought the news of Kavanagh's death to us, he exclaimed in accents of horror—

"What a shocking event! What an awful tragedy!" And he added, with still deeper pathos, "What a beautiful case we have lost!"

"There is plenty left for you to do," said Gordon. "Affairs at Lambeth must be in a very complicated condition."

"Terribly complicated, I should say, sir. The heirs of the late Mr. Kavanagh will naturally put in a claim upon the estate."

"You will settle what is due to them, and if they claim more, fight 'em."

"Fight them, sir?—yes, with pleasure. Then there's Mr. Bell's claim as partner."

"Well, I beg you to do the very best you can for him."

"Certainly; but there's your own solicitor. He may raise objections in your behalf."

"So much the better for you. You can fight him. Make a good job of it, you know. Don't hurry it."

"You may depend upon that. I allude, of course, to making a good job of it."

The next great event was the marriage of George Gordon and Judith Bell. That was a very grand affair, for George would have it so. There were eight bridesmaids, and I was one of them. The Grange was full of visitors at that time; every room was occupied, and the place rang with the pleasant sound of laughter and young voices from morning till night, and indeed from night till morning sometimes when there was dancing. Mère Lucas consented to have a cook under her, and the whole manage-

ment of the house was given to me and a bevy of new servants.

All this was very strange to me; that, perhaps, is why I find it so difficult to describe. It was delightful to find myself surrounded by cultivated girls who led eventless lives, to listen to their eager talk about dress and trifles, and to feel that I also was free from care and anxiety. I shared their pleasures to the full, and joined with excitement in all their amusements. I was light-hearted and happy through the whole round of innocent dissipation, and yet—well, I was happier still when it was all over, and we were left, Taras and I, to renew our quiet life.

Taras seemed to regret the absence of his friends more than I; he was unusually grave the morning after Gordon and his wife went away.

"You miss the hum of voices?" I said, as we were walking in the garden.

"Yes. It is like evening after a busy day."

It cannot always be day," said I gently, to console him; "and, after all, evening is the most beautiful time."

"Do you think so?" he asked quickly.

"I am afraid I do. I love calm too much, perhaps. I can think of nothing more beautiful than a quiet life, such as we lived in the old days. You see, I am unused to society; but," I added hopefully, "in time I shall fall in with the ways of other people and like them more. I must like all that you like."

"Would you never want anything more than I could give you—nothing more than a share in the joys of a man like me?"

"There is no other man like you. If I share all that befalls you—joys and griefs—and be always your companion, your little friend—"

"You must be more to me than that," he said, stopping and speaking with passionate fervour as he took me into his arms. "You must be my wife!"

We were married quietly before Gordon and his wife returned from their honeymoon; and thus Taras gave me a second name—more than that, indeed; for those who like the sound of titles call me the Princess Borgensky.

THE END.

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